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Matthew Patrick Durkin

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"UNORTHODOX CONDUCT": RE-MEMBERING QUEER AFRICA IN LITERATURE AND  
FILM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Matthew Durkin

May 2017

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Matthew P. Durkin

2017

"UNORTHODOX CONDUCT": RE-MEMBERING QUEER AFRICA IN LITERATURE  
AND FILM

By

Matthew P. Durkin

Approved April 7, 2017

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## ABSTRACT

# "UNORTHODOX CONDUCT": RE-MEMBERING QUEER AFRICA IN LITERATURE AND FILM

By

Matthew P. Durkin

May 2017

Dissertation supervised by Professor Emad Mirmotahari

"Unorthodox Conduct" explores positive representations of sexual and gender minorities in African literatures and film from the 1970s to 2010s that dismantle heterosexist notions of African sexuality and work towards what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls "re-membering." I interrogate how literary and cinematic depictions of same-sex sexualities resist contemporary homophobic attitudes, particularly those espoused by government and spiritual leaders. Positive literary and cinematic representations of queer Africans, however, have only emerged in recent years. These literary and cinematic representations are routinely minimized or ignored in academia as valid avenues for the navigation of interpersonal relationships and socio-political strife in queer African communities. Nevertheless, queer African narratives do significant work as they threaten the stability of state-sponsored homophobia and narratives of an authentic and normative African identity. They undermine stereotypes and heterosexist mythologies designed to instill fear and

hatred of non-normative identities and sexualities. This project explores several texts: Yulisa Amadu Maddy's novel *No Past, No Present, No Future* (1973), Chinelo Okparanta's novel *Under the Udala Trees* (2015), Diriye Osman's short story collection *Fairytales for Lost Children* (2013), and Laurent Bocahut and Philip Brooks' documentary *Woubi chéri* (1998). These works provide diverse representations of queer Africa, all of which resist heterosexist notions of a normative "African" identity.

Building upon V.Y. Mudimbe's notion of the "idea of Africa," I contend that at stake in these narratives is control over what "Africa" means and what qualifies as an "African" identity. Tracing the history of queerness in Africa back to Victorian-era anthropological and ethnographic scholarship, as well as Afrocentric thought, I argue that queer African memory has undergone extensive, intentional erasure. Only in the past twenty years have scholars produced rich histories and socio-cultural explanations for same-sex loving and non-gender conforming individuals and communities in various African contexts. Most of this scholarship originates in the fields of anthropology, ethnography, and human rights discourse. I emphasize that literary and cinematic works, too, advocate for the remembrance of queer Africa, though they remain insufficiently studied as effective forms of resistance. Responding to this gap in scholarship, "Unorthodox Conduct" centralizes literature and cinema as critical sites of queer African memory as they expand what it means to be African.

## DEDICATION

For my wife, Ariel and our daughter, Josie. And, without a doubt, for my parents, Pat and Sandy.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A sincere thanks to the members of my committee: Dr. Emad Mirmotahari, Dr. Laura Engel, and Dr. James Holstun. Your guidance, support, and constructive criticism over the years helped make this project. A thank you will never fully encapsulate what all of you have done for me, but it is the only phrase that works: thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

I must also thank everyone who helped me from my undergraduate studies to this moment. Thank you to Dr. Christine Doran, Dr. Derek Maus, and Dr. Donald McNutt at SUNY Potsdam for encouraging me to pursue literary studies at a time when I did not know what to do.

I must thank Dr. Judith Funston. After underperforming – frankly not attending – in her Introduction to Literature course during my sophomore year, Dr. Funston informed me that I could not pass her class. During those times that I did attend, Dr. Funston introduced me to illuminating works, particularly Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown." I never knew the power of literature until I took her class. I failed her course, but she made me question what I wanted to do with my life.

Lastly, I want to thank my family: to my parents, Pat and Sandy, for their unending love, support, and instillation of a strong work ethic required to finish this project. To my sister, Katie, for attending all of my band concerts – school-related and extra-curricular – because I know she reveled in every single one. To my favorite person, my wife, Dr. Ariel Nereson, for her love during times of self-doubt. And to our daughter, Josie, whose arrival taught me about the boundless possibilities of love.



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## INTRODUCTION: Re-membering Queer Africa<sup>1</sup>

Queer African memory faces the threat of erasure. African politicians, faith-based leaders, and laypeople alike, have actively disremembered and forgotten non-normative sexual and gender identities in an effort to manufacture a singular, authentic "African" identity.<sup>2</sup> The spread of homophobic rhetoric links homosexuality with the eradication of African traditions, a perceived antipathy towards reproduction, an affiliation with foreign entities as well as bestial, non-human behaviors.<sup>3</sup> Homosexuality threatens African traditions. Containment and eradication of homosexuality, then, will help preserve what it means to be "African."

Although homophobic rhetoric reflects modern concerns about the loss of African traditions, these arguments originate from beyond the continent, particularly from European colonial-era ideological tenets and legal systems.<sup>4</sup> Historical evidence confirms that European imperialists established political, legal, educational, and religious systems dedicated to the eradication of African cultures. Colonialists employed missionary educational programs designed to eradicate indigenous language; forcibly extricate bodies to different shores; and remake Africans to mirror European ideals, effectively overthrowing indigenous religious,

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<sup>1</sup> In this project, I use "queer" as a broad, overarching term to describe various forms of sexual and gender identities, particularly those who do not share heterosexual desires or participate in gendered norms as dictated by biological sex. I offer further explanation later in this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> See Neville Hoad's *African Intimacies*; Ashley Currier's *Out in Africa*; Crystal Biruk's "'Aid for Gays': The Moral and the Material in 'African Homophobia' in Post-2009 Malawi"; Wayne Dynes' "Homosexuality in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Unnecessary Controversy"; Henriette Gunkel's "Some Reflections on Postcolonial Homophobia, Local Interventions, and LGBTI Solidarity Online: The Politics of Global Petitions"; and Tavia Nyong'o's "Queer Africa and the Fantasy of Virtual Participation."

<sup>3</sup> See S.N. Nyeck and Marc Epprecht's edited collection *Sexual Diversity in Africa*.

<sup>4</sup> See Bart Luijck and Madeleine Maurick's *Homosexuality in Africa: A Disturbing Love*; Chantal Zabus' *Out in Africa*; Sokari Ekine's "Contesting Narratives of Queer Africa"; and Desiree Lewis' "Representing African Sexualities."

economic, political, and cultural systems.<sup>5</sup> One result of European colonialization was the demonization and erasure of non-heterosexual sexualities and gender non-conforming constructs. Colonialists systematically erased African sexualities that did not conform to European codes and Christian teachings. The application of sodomy laws and missionary education instilled Victorian-era European moral and ethical attitudes towards "deviant" sexualities and genders. As a result, deviant African sexualities and genders that were *not perceived as deviant within local contexts* were deemed incompatible with European morals and values. In effect, European imperial interference instigated the erasure of queer African bodies. Furthermore, Victorian-era legal systems continue to sustain such erasure.

While colonialists maintained punitive control over African bodies on the continent, anthropologists and ethnologists developed epistemological systems that transformed Africans into solely heterosexual beings. The relationship between anthropologists, ethnologists, and colonial governments is well documented.<sup>6</sup> Marc Epprecht writes about the systemic regularity of late nineteenth and twentieth-century anthropologists and ethnologists, such as E.E. Evans-Pritchard, to not acknowledge, let alone publish, evidence of same-sex sexualities among African peoples so as to preserve imperialist fantasies of African heterosexual purity.<sup>7</sup> The "heterosexism of the ethnography," writes Epprecht, affirmed "the commonplace assumption or assertion as an

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<sup>5</sup> See Greg Thomas' *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power*.

<sup>6</sup> See Marc Epprecht's *Hungochani* and *Heterosexual Africa* and Deborah Amory's "'Homosexuality' in Africa: Issues and Debates."

<sup>7</sup> Epprecht, Marc. *Heterosexual Africa?* Ohio UP, 2008: 103-4. In the chapter "The Ethnography of African Straightness," Epprecht elucidates Evans-Pritchard's work amongst the work of his academic colleagues. Epprecht's stance towards Evan-Pritchard, however, is not without detractors. Chantal Zabus finds Epprecht's assertions "excessive," suggesting that Evans-Pritchard "simply never got round to publishing all his notes" (36). As Zabus notes, debates about Evans-Pritchard's writings are not trivial as they potentially confirm the close relationship between Western academics and imperial governments. Also see Gaurav Desai's *Subject to Colonialism* for a rebuttal against wholesale demonization of colonial-era anthropologists and ethnologists.

unqualified fact that Africans south of the Sahara did not practice same-sex sexuality.”<sup>8</sup> The refusal to publish these accounts has significantly influenced contemporary anti-LGBTQ rhetoric since it “derived at least as much from a set of normative beliefs as from the cool scientific observation that many anthropologists claimed.”<sup>9</sup> Such unilateral practices reaffirmed “impression[s] that Africans are virtually unique in the world in the absence of, ignorance about, or intolerance toward exceptions to the heterosexual norm.”<sup>10</sup> Colonial anthropologists enforced cultural and social mores upon African subjects and their refusal to publish their findings sustained narratives of the inconceivability of homosexuality amongst Africans.<sup>11</sup> Through published works, colonial anthropologists and ethnographers “externally conceptualized and produced” knowledge about sexuality in Africa.<sup>12</sup>

In 1885, famed British explorer and Orientalist Sir Richard Burton deemed Africa south of the Sahara outside of the Sotadic Zone, an imagined space that stretched across the globe. The Sotadic Zone cordoned off where homosexuality could and could not exist.<sup>13</sup> Burton excluded all of Africa except for the northern coastline. “The negro race is mostly untainted by sodomy and tribalism,” wrote Burton.<sup>14</sup> Years later, in 1898, German anthropologist M. Haberlandt wrote of Arab influences in contemporary Zanzibar and the importation of tools designed for female

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 35.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 35.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 35.

<sup>11</sup> See Kwame Essien and Saheed Aderinto's "'Cutting the Head of the Roaring Monster': Homosexuality and Repression in Africa."

<sup>12</sup> Arnfred, Signe. "African Feminists on Sexualities." *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue canadienne des études africaines*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2009, pp. 151.

<sup>13</sup> The Sotadic Zone encompassed the Iberian Peninsula, southern France, Italy and Greece, and stretched eastward to include significant portions of China, most of Japan and most of the South Sea, as well as all of the Americas. The Zone also included most of the north African coast. Also see Robert Aldrich's work on Richard Burton in *Colonialism and Homosexuality* and Joseph Massad's "Introduction" in his *Desiring Arabs*.

<sup>14</sup> Burton cited in Murray and Roscoe, pp. xii.

pleasure. Reminiscent of Burton, Haberlandt noted, "[o]ccurrences of contrary-sex among the Negro population of Zanzibar, inborn as well as acquired contrariness, probably exists only in rare instances."<sup>15</sup> In the controversial ethnographic work *Voodoo-Eros*, published in German in 1923 and translated into English in 1933, Felix Byrk declared, "[t]he abnormal in sexual life is despised in Africa."<sup>16</sup> In a three-page chapter dedicated solely to sodomy – aptly titled "Sodomy" – Byrk dismissed male homosexuality entirely: "The sense of decency among the blacks, fundamentally normal in their sexual life, is repelled especially by sodomitic acts, which are punished severely."<sup>17</sup> Homosexuality represents a foreign intrusion and is impermissible when present. All three texts suggest homosexuality exists, albeit quite rarely, in some form in Africa south of the Sahara; however, it is "despised" and against "fundamentally normal" sexual practices.

The erasure of queer African memory, however, cannot be placed entirely in European hands. Prominent figures in post-colonial and Afro-centric discourses have produced accounts of homosexuality that conflate homosexuality with the European excess and reaffirm the sheer incomprehensibility of homosexuality amongst Africans. In his seminal work *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon undercuts Western mythologies designed to subdue black bodies. Over the course of his work, Fanon examines how white colonialists remade black bodies to fit in Western concepts of "civilization" in an effort to reaffirm white supremacy. According to European racist concepts, black societies existed on the lowest rung of civilizational hierarchy – known as the "Great Chain of Being" – whereas white, Western culture resided on top as the exemplar

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<sup>15</sup> Haberlandt, M. "Occurrences of Contrary-Sex Among the Negro Population of Zanzibar" Trans. Bradley Rose. *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexuality*, edited by Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, Palgrave, 1998, pp. 63.

<sup>16</sup> Byrk, Felix. *Voodoo-Eros*. United Book Guild, 1964, pp. 230.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 231.

of human achievement.<sup>18</sup> As a result, black individuals developed a self-contemptuous inferiority complex through the absorption and internalization of colonial culture. Over time, this complex was "naturalized." Couched in his powerful assessment of racism is a "passing" remark via footnote on homosexuality in the Antilles and, in general, the Global South. The footnote reads as follows:

Let us mention in passing that we have never observed the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique, the reason being the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles. The schema of homosexuality is well known to us. There are, nevertheless, what they call 'men dressed as women' or *makoumé*. They mainly wear a jacket and skirt. But we are convinced that they lead a normal sexual life. They drink rum punch like any other guy, and are not insensitive to the charms of women, be they fishwives or vegetable sellers. In Europe, on the other hand, we have known colleagues who have become homosexuals, though always passive. But there was nothing neurotic in their homosexuality and for them it was an expedient, as pimping is for others.<sup>19</sup>

The Oedipus complex, Fanon notes, is the foundation for homosexuality within Europe. It is not present in the Antilles, thereby rendering homosexuality psychologically impossible. Although he mentions the existence of *makoumé* – described as men who don female attire – he rejects their being homosexual.<sup>20</sup> As per his observations, these men lead "normal" sex lives. Only upon

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<sup>18</sup> For further explanation of the "Great Chain of Being," see John and Jean Comaroff's "Africa Observed: Discourses of the Imperial Imagination."

<sup>19</sup> Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Richard Philcox. Grove Press, 2008, pp.157-8n44.

<sup>20</sup> *Makoumé*, writes Vanessa Agard-Jones, is a "Créole colloquialism that roughly translates as 'faggot' in English" (194n1). H. Adlai Murdoch aligns *makoumé* with the term "auntie-man," a derisory word projected at men who lack masculine attributes (254).

arrival in Europe, he notes, can a black man become homosexual, ostensibly due to the continent's thriving Oedipus complex. Homosexuality, then, is something one acquires via European influence.

Prominent Afrocentric theorist, M.K. Asante, affirms Fanon's assessment of homosexuality as European affiliated. He incorporates Fanon's perspectives into Afrocentric thought whereby homosexuality is incompatible with African intellectual and cultural liberation: "Homosexuality is a deviation from Afrocentric thought because it makes the person evaluate his own physical needs above the teachings of national consciousness. An outburst of homosexuality among black men, fed by the prison breeding system, threatens to distort the relationship between friends....We must demonstrate a real antagonism toward those gays who are as unconscious as other people."<sup>21</sup> Homosexuality amongst black men is a direct result of white supremacist prison systems. The instillation of homosexuality amongst black men wears and breaks down community necessary for liberation from white supremacy. Furthermore, whereas Fanon questions the existence of homosexuality amongst non-Europeans, Asante recognizes the presence homosexuality within black male communities: "The rise of homosexuality in the African-American male's psyche is real and complicated. An Afrocentric perspective recognizes its existence but homosexuality cannot be condoned or accepted as good for the national development of a strong people."<sup>22</sup> Moreover, homosexuality threatens "national development" due to its European connotations. "We can no longer allow our lives to be controlled by European decadence," concludes Asante.<sup>23</sup> Rehashing Fanon's words, black men exhibit homosexuality not because they are "born that way" but due to untoward European influences.

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<sup>21</sup> Asante, M.K. *Afrocentricity*. Africa World Press, 1988, pp. 57.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 57.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 57.

Other Afrocentric scholars, such as Victor Oguejiofor Okafor and Frances Cress Welsing, produced similar scholarship that reaffirmed patriarchal conventions of family and the association of white supremacy and homosexuality, respectively.<sup>24</sup> Afrocentric scholarship is dedicated to the revitalization of African cultures, languages, and histories; yet Afrocentric scholars reduce homosexuality as a disease incompatible with African ideals, thereby ignoring and erasing African histories in the name of an idealized past. Imperialistic European anthropological and ethnographic scholarship informs a portion of Afrocentric discourse to extent that both imagine an Edenic Africa, a constructed landscape built upon intentional falsifications and misrepresentations, particularly when it comes to homosexuality.

The eradication of queer African bodies in philosophical and theoretical realms extends into literary and cinematic studies.<sup>25</sup> Scholars in attendance at the 17th Annual African Literature Association Conference in 1991 denied homosexuality to be a pertinent issue for discussion. Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi provides her account: "African literary critics are not concerned with lesbian or gay issues because this topic is very sensitive and often controversial, or because

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<sup>24</sup> See Victor Oguejiofor Okafor's "Diop and the African Origin of Civilization: An Afrocentric Analysis" and Frances Cress Welsing's *The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors*. In her untitled article from the edited collection *First Word*, Welsing promotes a psychoanalytic interpretation of homosexuality as innately white supremacist. Homosexuality is a weapon of white supremacy, she argues, for homosexuality is the "total effeminization" of black men. If effeminization of black men occurs, then it prevents for the continuation of African cultures through the negation of heterosexual reproduction. She further argues that homosexuality did not exist within Africa prior to the arrival of Europeans, writing, "The nonwhite males in Afrika did not have homosexuality in the first place. After they are conquered and reduced to passivity and taken out of the home, you begin to see a pattern of homosexuality and bisexuality within the black population. At this point in time, we have epidemic levels of black male bisexuality and homosexuality" (107). Also see Stephen Howe's excellent work on Afrocentrism in *Afrocentrism: Mythical Past and Imagined Homes* and Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Europe Upside Down: Fallacies of the New Afrocentrism."

<sup>25</sup> Mwangi, Evan. *Africa Writes Back to Self*. SUNY Press, 2009, pp. 192.



they view other issues as more pressing."<sup>26</sup> When the issue does arise, some scholars outright refuse to acknowledge the possibility of homosexuality in African contexts. For example, Alexie Tcheuyap, a scholar of African cinema, denounces the imaginative possibility of homosexuality amongst Africans, thereby rendering African cinematic representations of homosexuality as "un-African." Foremost, sex is "usually straightforward, and men do not usually start with any preliminaries." He continues:

It is very conventional, and certain practices, such as homosexuality, or 'manoeuvres anales/anal manoeuvres' for example, are almost unimaginable, if not immoral. Africans do not see any sense or pleasure in enjoying the 'dirty parts', parts through which all the stinking ugly substances are drained.<sup>27</sup>

Male and female homosexuality cannot exist; sex is not for female pleasure and African men cannot fathom the possibility of anal sex, as if anal sex is the only form of pleasure allowable among homosexual men. Furthermore, Tcheuyap promotes an essentialist image of homosexuality as "anal manoeuvres," which abides to stereotypical perspectives of homosexual relationships as solely between men and based entirely in sexual acts. Achille Mbembe, who calls the anus the "accursed organ and sign par excellence of abjection," writes, "To be sure, homosexuality – or for that matter same sex practices – is not reducible to anality. But the degradation and disgust with which anality is made the object of public discourse goes hand in hand with the recurrent appearance of the anus on the scene of the symptom, in a variety of

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<sup>26</sup> Nfah-Abbenyi, Juliana Makuchi. *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality, and Difference*. Indiana UP, 1997, pp. 29.

<sup>27</sup> Tcheuyap, Alexie. *Postnationalist African Cinemas*. Manchester UP, 2011, pp. 143

fantasmatic shapes."<sup>28</sup> Tcheuyap's tired regurgitation of homophobic rhetoric discounts the possibility of queer African bodies.

The denial of homosexuality in African contexts ensures its erasure. Matt Richardson observes such erasure of black queer memory from the diasporic collective memory: "Black queers do not figure into the collective memory. The Black queer falls even deeper into the abyss of negation because we are not even part of the memory of loss. We are not grieved by the collective; our claims are rejected as inauthentically Black and 'un-African.' We are disremembered and unrecognized by our own – negated by the negated, dissociated from Black memory."<sup>29</sup> Indeed, homosexuality has been rejected in the name of a singular conceptualization of African identity. Ironically, the rejection of queer African memory as somehow inauthentic or un-African reinforces essentialist premises originally envisioned by European colonialists. The erasure of queer African memory has led to the promotion of homosexuality as inherently un-African, as originating from foreign lands and as representative of European ideals.

African authors, too, have participated in the erasure of queer Africans. In his foundational article, "'Wheyting be dat?': The Treatment of Homosexuality in African Literatures," Chris Dunton historicizes African literary tentativeness concerning representations of homosexuality.

[T]he practice of homosexuality within African society remains an area of experience that has not been granted a history by African writers, but has been greeted, rather, with a sustained outburst of silence. Whether this has been carried out within or beyond the limits of the stereotype, the identification of

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<sup>28</sup> Mbembe, Achille. "On the Postcolony: a brief response to critics." *African Identities*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2006, pp. 167.

<sup>29</sup> Richardson, Matt. *The Queer Limit of Black Memory*. Ohio State UP, 2013, pp. 10.

homosexuality with the West has helped defend that silence. An 'official' history has concealed the reluctance of African writers to admit homosexuality into the bounds of a different kind of discussion.<sup>30</sup>

Only recently have African authors from across the continent and throughout the diaspora begun to create queer African characters. Undoing decades of stereotypical representations of homosexuality, authors have centralized queer Africans with the express purpose of discrediting negative perceptions of homosexuality in Africa as well as disrupting predominate Western conceits of a uniformly homophobic Africa. Unfortunately, Dunton's observations continue to resonate in African literary studies. Over twenty-five years have passed and only now are scholars of African literatures fielding the possibility of new scholarly ventures, such as the newly formed discourse "Queer African Studies," perhaps signaling an end to the decades-long "sustained outburst of silence."<sup>31</sup> I discuss the advent of Queer African Studies in greater detail in Chapter One.

There have been other organized intellectual integrations of queer studies/theory with race. Scholars battled with queerness in black diaspora studies and the internal contradictions between queerness and the "rules" of blackness. "Queer discourses in black diaspora studies," writes Rinaldo Walcott, "remain against the rules."<sup>32</sup> Imagined black bodies automatically connote heterosexuality, argues Walcott, and deviations from "normal" conceptualizations pose a direct threat to dominant cultural notions of masculinity and femininity, notions promoted by

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<sup>30</sup> Dunton, Chris. "'Wheyting be Dat?' The Treatment of Homosexuality in African Literatures." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 20, no. 3, Autumn 1989, pp. 445.

<sup>31</sup> For an introduction to Queer African Studies, see Ashley Currier and Thérèse Migrations-George's "Queer Studies/African Studies: An (Im)possible Transaction."

<sup>32</sup> Walcott, Rinaldo. "Against the Rules of Blackness: Hilton Als's *The Women* and Jamaica Kincaid's *My Brother* (Or How to Raise Black Queer Kids)." *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean*, edited by Faith Smith. University of Virginia Press, 2011, pp. 75.

Asanti and fellow Afrocentric scholars. Rules, however, are meant to be broken. Queer of color theory and black queer studies reclaimed queer black bodies, primarily those throughout the diaspora, in an effort to prevent permanent erasure. Scholars such as José Esteban Muñoz, Roderick Ferguson, E. Patrick Johnson, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, M. Jacqui Alexander, and Jafari S. Allen have formulated intricate and dynamic notions of queerness and its relationship with race. Tinsley, in her article "Black Atlantic/Queer Atlantic," offered a queered take on Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*: "To think the black queer Atlantic, not only must its metaphors be materially informed; they must be internally discontinuous, allowing for differences and inequalities between situated subjects that are always already part of both diaspora and queerness."<sup>33</sup> The black queer Atlantic, Tinsley suggests, is "always churning, always different even from itself."<sup>34</sup> Jafari S. Allen further elaborates Tinsley's assessment: the "black/queer/diaspora is an organic project of multivalent and multiscalar reclamation, revisioning, and futurity (yes, all at once)."<sup>35</sup> And Muñoz, building upon Ernst Bloch's philosophy of hope, envisioned a queerness enraptured with a hopeful future, a queerness that is "not yet here."<sup>36</sup> These scholars revitalized lost queer black and queer of color memories. Furthermore, these discourses typically emerge from humanities discourses, especially literary and cinematic, in their promotion of counternarratives against normalized conceptualizations of blackness. Nevertheless, these works leave behind African bodies. Africans have been forgotten

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<sup>33</sup> Tinsley, Omise'eke Natasha. "Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage." *GLQ*, vol. 14, nos. 2/3, 2008, pp. 203.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 203.

<sup>35</sup> Allen, Jafari S. "Black/Queer/Diaspora at the Current Conjuncture." *GLQ*, vol. 18, nos. 2/3, 2012, pp. 214.

<sup>36</sup> Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York UP, 2009, pp. 1.

although processes of crossing and forced migrations have not.<sup>37</sup> Yet queer of color critique does not draw attention to or contextualize the existence of queer African bodies. Can these forgotten queer Africans and their memories be revived? I believe the answer is a resounding "yes."

"Unorthodox Conduct" navigates the possibilities of reinserting queer African bodies back into African histories, be they "official" or not, through literary and cinematic practices. While others have explored how African authors expressed queer bodies through "heavily coded terms,"<sup>38</sup> this project focuses on direct, explicit representations of queer African bodies. I view these conscious representations as attempts to re-member queer African bodies, and, in doing so, produce counternarratives to politically and socio-culturally dominant rhetoric that frames queer sexualities and genders as foreign, Western importations. The re-membrance of queer African bodies is not only a theoretical project. It is based on a conglomeration of works, inspired by multiple, intertwining strands of thought and action. This project endeavors to continue critical conversations about how literature and cinema can produce counternarratives against heterosexist constructions of African bodies and desires.

### *Re-membering Queer Africa(ns)*

Chinua Achebe published his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, in 1958. It is a compelling novel set in nineteenth-century Nigeria about Okonkwo, his family, his village of Umuofia, and the threat of European colonialism. *Things Fall Apart* stands against dominant Eurocentric narratives of an Africa without history. Until the arrival of Europeans, Africa was a world without consequence in the grand scheme of human history. *Things Fall Apart* countered such

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<sup>37</sup> For an extensive exploration on the relationships between migration, diaspora, sexuality, and memory, see M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred*.

<sup>38</sup> Mwangi, pp. 193.

condescending perspectives through its invocation of a complex, socially dynamic community. Simon Gikandi provided a concise valuation of Achebe's works, especially of *Things Fall Apart*, writing that "Achebe does not seek to recover the logic of a pre-colonial African culture in order to romanticize it, but to counter the colonial mythology that Africans did not have a culture before colonialism."<sup>39</sup> Through *Things Fall Apart*, and other critically important novels such as *Anthills on the Savannah* and *Arrow of God*, Achebe composed counternarratives against entrenched Eurocentric narratives of an Africa without history, an Africa existent outside of time. His works did not just pose counternarratives: they advocated for the reclamation and resuscitation of African cultures. But this did not result in the composition of romanticist imagery and an Edenic Africa. Rather, the recreation of African cultures – for Achebe, primarily Igbo – comprised of complicated imagery, imperfect characters, and situations and conflicts that did not slice cleanly down the middle with a clearly labeled "good" and "bad" side.

Achebe's essays, too, spoke to the social and cultural power behind literature. In his essay "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation," Achebe states "that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty."<sup>40</sup> Literature offers avenues for imaginatively conjuring new worlds and examining worlds long viewed as non-existent. Indeed, literature – in general, all artistic creations – promotes realities, philosophies, feelings, and identities that may in fact alter contemporary perspectives. In "The Truth of Fiction," he notes that "art is man's constant effort to create for himself a different order of reality from that which

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<sup>39</sup> Gikandi, Simon. "Achebe, Chinua." *Routledge Encyclopedia of African Literature*, edited by Simon Gikandi, Routledge, 2009, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Achebe, Chinua. "The Role of the Writer in a New Nation." *African Writers on African Writing*, edited by G.D. Killam, Heinemann, 1973, pp. 8.

is given to him; an aspiration to provide himself with a second handle on existence *through his imagination*."41

Achebe wrote in English for the course of his career. In his important essay from 1965 "English and the African Writer," Achebe expounds upon how to define African literature and the implications of writing in colonial or indigenous languages. Colonial influences throughout Africa have resulted in widespread distribution of colonial languages, writes Achebe, but they "came as part of a package deal that included many other items of doubtful value, especially the atrocities of racial arrogance and prejudice which may yet set the world on fire."42 Indeed, racial prejudice comprised only one portion of the "package deal" which has "set the world on fire." For the arrival of colonialism also announced the arrival of the legislation and criminalization of non-normative sexualities and deviant bodies. Achebe, however, is not concerned with these issues. Rather, he questions linguistic influences within African writing and what to do with colonial languages. He writes:

The real question is not whether Africans could write in English, but whether they ought to. Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal, and produces a guilty feeling.

But for me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it.<sup>43</sup>

Achebe's insistence on writing in English is not a choice for he had "been given this language."

But his acquisition of English is not passive reception; he is not imitating or replicating English tropes or ideals. His job as a writer is to imagine and create a "new English, still in full

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41 Achebe, Chinua. "The Truth of Fiction." *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, edited by Ato Quayson and Tejumola Olaniyan, Wiley-Blackwell, 2007, pp. 107.

42 Achebe, Chinua. "English and the African Writer." *Transition*, nos. 75/76, 1997, pp. 345.

43 *ibid.*, pp. 348.

communication with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surroundings."<sup>44</sup> Like the adoption of the novel, Achebe interprets English as a device to communicate ignored and erased histories of Africa to the wider world.

Conversely, prominent Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has dedicated decades of his career to the reclamation of indigenous African languages within African literatures. In *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ articulates a vision of language as a carrier of cultural memory. Similarly to Achebe, he argues that oral and written literatures are the predominate forms for the generational transference of cultural, social, and collective memory:

Language carries culture and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings. Language is thus inseparable from ourselves as a community of human beings with a specific form and character, a specific history, a specific relationship to the world.<sup>45</sup>

The institutionalization of the colonial tongue forcefully spread a culturally specific worldview while simultaneously destroying another. The English, especially, systematically eradicated indigenous African languages thus resulting in the erasure of social myths, folklore, and stories. Although Ngũgĩ speaks primarily of literature as fiction, all forms of written and orally transferable knowledge face the threat of erasure.

In his later work *Something Torn and New*, Ngũgĩ reaffirms his commitment to language as a source of cultural memory. Through the act of "re-membering," a conscious effort to

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<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 349.

<sup>45</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind*. James Currey, 2005, pp. 16.



reinstitutionalize indigenous African languages via literature and other creative practices, African cultures may thrive once again. Ngũgĩ argues that only through the reinstitutionalization of African languages will African cultures regain their cultural identities. Language maintains "the collective memory back of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next."<sup>46</sup> Languages long relegated to informal conversations or cast aside for European tongues must seek new avenues for large-scale societal exposure. Re-membering contains the promise of reverting colonial indoctrination through creative practices in the search for the "quest for wholeness." Acts of creative re-imagining and re-membering offer opportunities to reinvigorate indigenous memories:

Creative imagination is one of the greatest re-membering practices. The relationship of writers to their social memory is central to their quest and mission. Memory is the link between the past and the present, between space and time, and it is the base of our dreams. Writers and the intellectuals in these movements [e.g. negritude] are aware that without a reconnection with African memory, there is no wholeness.<sup>47</sup>

Literary works would not be the only beneficiaries in this quest, for the "renaissance is not about literature alone, but, rather, entails exploration of the frontiers in the whole realm of economics, politics, science, and arts as well as the extension of dreams and imagination. Still, the quest for knowledge is central to the enterprise."<sup>48</sup> Re-membering revitalizes African cultures beyond creative practices: it instills a sense of pride in community and reaffirms dedication to African

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<sup>46</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Something Torn and New: An African Renaissance*. CivitasBooks, 2009, pp. 15.

<sup>47</sup> Ngũgĩ, *Something Torn and New*, pp. 39.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 122-3.

cultural ideals. What exactly those ideals are, especially after years of colonial influence and linguistic denunciation, remain unclear.

Ngũgĩ has spent decades working through the interconnected relationships between language, culture, and memory. Whereas *Decolonising the Mind*, spoke of the alteration of African minds through the erasure of indigenous languages, *Something Torn and New* offers an additional premise: colonialism "attacks and completely distorts a people's relationship to their natural, bodily, economic, political, and cultural base. Moreover, with this base destroyed, the wholeness of the African subject, the subject in active engagement with his environment, is fragmented."<sup>49</sup> The "great dismemberment" remade African subjects – mind *and* body – to reflect European socio-cultural mores. The institutionalization of European languages sustained the dismemberment and the only way to "re-member" is through the revitalization of indigenous African languages. If re-membering thrives via revitalization of indigenous languages, and both mind and body are rewritten, then how have sexual identities been rewritten?

This question poses a problem for re-membering practices. Queer identities will and have been intentionally forgotten due to their incompatibility with contemporary conceptualizations of an authentic African identity. A conflict of interest exists between the reaffirmation and revitalization of African identities via indigenous languages. For the reclamation of indigenous languages would also promote the linguistic reclamation of sexual and gender identities and terminologies. And yet, certain identities have been intentionally misaligned with colonialism, reframed as products of European imperialism, and representative of continued Western influence. The affirmation of traditional and authentic conceptualizations of African culture renders non-normative sexualities and genders as products of deviant foreign influences. Even

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<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 29.

with historians from within and beyond Africa resuscitating and revitalizing indigenous terms that detail different ways of being – socially, sexually, bodily – within African contexts, these identities are rarely, if ever, acknowledged as a part of re-membered cultures. As I discuss further in chapter one, scholars have resuscitated pre-colonial indigenous terms for various gender and sexual identities as a form of authenticating multiple conceits of what it means to be African. Furthermore, new and different identities emerge constantly; linguistic battles amongst queer activists at times defy this re-membering process whereby language does not fully encapsulate bodily desires and actions.

Nevertheless, Ngũgĩ's argument is important for its critique of Eurocentric formations of African bodies. The irony emanates from current anti-homosexuality movements and rhetoric in which African leaders proclaim adherence to Victorian-era socio-cultural ideals and "foreign" religions.<sup>50</sup> Ngũgĩ's concept of re-membering promotes the reinsertion of forgotten identities back into African cultures; he recognizes the cultural, social, and economic potential in regaining what has been lost. In many ways, linguistic revitalization of queer African identities has been a critical component for LGBTQ activists. Historical examinations of indigenous languages, especially, work to determine the presence or absence of non-normative sexualities within several African ethnic groups and regions. Language operates as a barometer of local socio-cultural traditions and norms when it comes to non-heterosexual sexualities, which, so the arguments claim, historicize African sexualities as encompassing more than procreative

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<sup>50</sup> Christianity and Islam compose the two most influential religions in the fight against homosexuality. Other scholars have suggested that both religions are foreign to Africa thereby negating their usage as a source of African authenticity. While I find such arguments compelling for certain areas of Africa, it is important not to produce essentialist African histories. Both religions have extensive histories along east Africa. Christian influences in Africa stretch back to the first century CE in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, religion does influence homophobic ideals and has contributed to various legislations concerned with the eradication and criminalization of homosexuality.

heterosexuality. Language, however, is not the driving force in the re-membrance of queer sexual and gender identities. To return to Ngũgĩ's focus on the body, language can influence how one perceives one's body as well as the bodies of others. Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* provides the foundation for such work. But in privileging language over how bodies interact with one another and the surrounding world presume bodies to be secondary. I would like to reinsert the body back into re-membling.

It is here that Achebe's assertion of the power of the imaginative comes into play. Much like his novels accomplished against the predominate European narratives, queer narratives threaten the stability of state-sponsored homophobia and narratives of an authentic African identity. They undermine stereotypes and heterosexist mythologies designed to instill fear and hatred of non-normative identities and sexualities. Acts of reimagining have, as Matt Richardson argues, "just as much to do with reminding us that there are those who are being lost in the present, who are slipping out of memory before our eyes and at the tips of our fingers, as it does with populating the past with forgotten subjects."<sup>51</sup> Imaginative representations of same-sex sexuality direct attention away from the strictly theoretical or statistically factual. Rosamond S. King insightfully describes the power of imagination: "The benefits of products of the imagination are no less worthy because they can be difficult to qualify. The arts turn facts into a different kind of truth, a more empathetic truth, than statistics."<sup>52</sup> Cultural and literary texts not only narrate African experiences, but project new, different, and alternative ways in which Africans perceive themselves as "sexual subjects, community members, and citizens."<sup>53</sup>

"Unorthodox Conduct" addresses the literary and cinematic archive dedicated to the

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<sup>51</sup> Richardson, pp. 15.

<sup>52</sup> King, Rosamond S. *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination*. University of Florida Press, 2014, pp. 18.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 18.

reconstruction of queer African bodies and memory primarily created by African authors. The sole outlier is the documentary *Woubi chéri* with its white French directors. The subject matter, however, is queer Africans and their explorations of gender and sexual identities in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Furthermore, "Unorthodox Conduct" attempts to advance a queer African literary archive. The chosen works make real a queer African imagination, which, in turn, allows for the emergence of the unspeakable.

This project advocates new research into how Africans across the continent approach sexualities through artistic endeavors. While not rejecting the social sciences and the research directed towards historical remembrances and resuscitation of pre-colonial sexual identities and practices, I argue that literary and cinematic studies allow for different voices from across the continent to converse across time and space. Neville Hoad captures the relationship between sexuality and African literatures:

Thinking about African sexuality through the reading of fiction needs to move on two occasionally contradictory strands and to work these strands against each other. The dominant hegemonic understanding of sexuality as a kind of subject-making discourse, increasingly organized around an identitarian homo-hetero binary needs resisting without falling into the historically hegemonic fantasy of Africa as a dark continent of primal, undifferentiated lusts and savage urges. Simultaneously, qualitatively, let it be asserted that African sexuality is as banal, as normative, as unruly, as potentially explosive, and as available for political and civilizational allegorizing as any sexuality.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Hoad, Neville. "The Blank Maps of Difficult Desires: Sexuality and African Literature." *Teaching the African Novel*, edited by Gaurav Desai, The Modern Language Association of America, 2009, pp. 355.

African literatures express the mundane alongside the spectacular. Queer African memory is not always revelatory; erasure, however, transforms everyday sexual and gender practices into sites of personal and communal revitalization. Re-membering cannot be a selective process; it cannot choose what should or should not be remembered. Ngũgĩ's call for the decolonization of the mind via language, there must be ways African authors decolonize the mind via sexuality.

Queer African literature is a work in progress, a slowly forming archive. This project specifically focuses on works from west and east Africa. This is due to two reasons: one, the relative lack of scholarship on these works; and two, the growing grasp of anti-homosexuality rhetoric in these regions. I chose not to address works from South Africa since those works alone could encompass a project of this length on their own.<sup>55</sup> By placing these works in dialogue with one another, I construct a small foundational mapping of queer African identities. From Côte d'Ivoire to Somalia, from Nigeria to Sierra Leone, these works do not point to an inherent sameness amongst queer African individuals and communities. Every work invokes idiosyncratic methods of re-membering queer Africans. Each work exists within its own specific socio-cultural and historical context: *Woubi chéri*, which I discuss in chapter three, is set in the city of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, one of the more "gay-friendly" cities within Africa south of the Sahara while Chinelo Okparanta's novel *Under the Udala Trees*, which I discuss in chapter four along with Diriye Osman's *Fairytales for Lost Children*, is hyper-aware of Nigeria's recent legislation criminalizing homosexuality. The chosen works exemplify Africa's cultural and historical diversity yet also revolve around the premise of queer African liberation.

In chapter one, "Homosexuality is un-African," I discuss the history of queer and how its academic, social, and cultural affiliations offer an uneasy migration into African contexts. I find

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<sup>55</sup> For a list of South African LGBTQ literary and cinematic works, see Brenna Munro's *A Dream of Love to Come*. Also see Mark Gevisser's *Lost and Found in Johannesburg*.

queer useful, however, for its ability to traverse gender and sexual identities, and as a pertinent critique of heteronormativity and patriarchal constraints. This is not to suggest all that non-normative and same-sex loving Africans adopt queer. However, signs point to its success as a prominent form of self-identification.<sup>56</sup> Since the chosen texts stretch from the early 1970s to 2015, queer also provides a cohesive relationship between texts and characters. Marc Epprecht, who was initially apprehensive about queer in African contexts, provides a neat argument for the usage of queer:

[Q]ueer [works] as a convenient shorthand to describe an antiessentialist approach...that is open to the whole range of human sexual diversity; that underscores sexuality as a critical component in the construction of class, race, national, ethnic, and other identities; that analyses language and silences in relation to material conditions and struggles; and that engages with current debates about global economic and other inequalities coming out of African feminist, subaltern, and critical masculinity studies...<sup>57</sup>

This invocation of queer is best exemplified in the short stories of Diriye Osman. His characters openly declare their queerness regardless of the term's socio-cultural and religious baggage. Although not all of the texts adopt an anti-essentialist stance – the subjects of *Woubi chéri* frequently attempt, and fail, to explain themselves in essentialist terms – "queer" offers a salient political, cultural, and social component capable of reflecting several sexual and gender identities. At times, I substitute queer for other terms, such as homosexual/homosexuality and same-sex loving individuals. This is primarily for the sake of accuracy or when issues of gender

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<sup>56</sup> See *Stories of our Lives*, a fictionalized documentary based upon interviews with queer Kenyans conducted by the Nairobi-based organization The Nest. Interviews were published in book-form under the same title.

<sup>57</sup> Epprecht, Marc. *Heterosexual Africa?*, Ohio UP, 2008, pp. 13

may not be at stake. This is most evident in my discussion of the phrase "homosexuality is un-African." Furthermore, I emphasize contextualized analyses when working with imaginative works. I use words and phrases common throughout each respective text to provide a fuller account of each respective work's representation of queerness. Queer allows for variants and diversity, thereby granting multiple genders and sexual identities space for articulation.

I recognize the potential pitfalls of using queer, especially in correlation with Ngũgĩ's remembering, namely through the renaming of African bodies to fit within a specific sexual and gender framework established by Western academics and activists. My advocacy of queer, however, is not intended to disremembering indigenous terminologies for what may now be perceived as non-normative identities. Nor is an attempt to co-opt those identities for the sole purpose of propagating queer as a trans-historical, transnational, transcultural conceit. To consciously do so would be to dis-member and disremember African bodies and, in their stead, remake Africans in the image of the West. Choice of words, especially when speaking of identities within specific local contexts, will always receive some form of critique, even within local communities. Ugandan activists in Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) speak of themselves as *kuchu*. Not all queer Ugandans, however, do not accept the term due to its militant connotations.<sup>58</sup> It is almost impossible not to shroud localized identities without some backlash. This backlash is necessary; it is pertinent to the development of international discourse amongst academics, activists, and laypeople alike.

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<sup>58</sup> See Stella Nyanzi's article "Dismantling reified African culture through localised homosexualities in Uganda" for social perceptions amongst queer Ugandans about the term *kuchu*.



## *Chapter Summaries*

Chapter one, "Homosexuality is un-African," highlights several key issues and debates between LGBTQ activists/scholars and African politicians and religious leaders. This chapter provides background information on rhetorical strategies and devices employed by opponents of LGBTQ rights within Africa. LGBTQ Africans are labeled as animals and insects; as devices of Western imperialism; and as actively disrupting and destroying heterosexual families, as well as recruiting children into homosexuality. All of these strategies stem from the overarching accusation that "homosexuality is un-African," a ubiquitous phrase which presumes a singular concept of African culture capable of determining what is and is not properly "African." These arguments appear repeatedly within the chosen works. Critical comprehension of these arguments is pertinent for a complete understanding of how the chosen texts push against socio-cultural attitudes towards homosexuality. Likewise, "Homosexuality is un-African" addresses oppositional arguments and tensions about queer as an overarching term to describe LGBTQ African sexualities and identities. Activist and scholarly proponents of LGBTQ rights in Africa have tentatively coalesced around the nascent moniker of "Queer African Studies." Accordingly, the process of re-membering queer Africa begins with the formation of powerful counternarratives against popular homophobic rhetoric. The aim of chapter one is provide foundational information about contemporary homophobic rhetoric on the continent and oppositional, pro-LGBTQ activism and scholarship.

"Unorthodox Conduct," the titular chapter, focuses on Sierra Leonean author and playwright Yulisa Amadu Maddy's sole novel, *No Past, No Present, No Future* (1973) and the character Joe Bengoh. Bengoh, a young boy from the fictional nation of Bauya, "acquires" homosexual inclinations after several experiences with the white missionary Father O'Don. Joe,

along with his two friends Ade and Santigie, travels to London to continue his education. His time in London results in his exploration of homosexuality, concluding with a positive relationship with a white Londoner named Michael. Conversely, Ade and Santigie represent African hypermasculinity, ostensibly exploiting women for personal pleasure and economic gains. Due to their hypermasculine attitudes, Ade and Santigie condemn Joe, using homophobic language, as a failure of proper African masculinity. Unlike Joe, Ade and Santigie destroy personal relationships with loved ones, ultimately finding themselves alone and without hope. This chapter underscores Maddy's usage and gradual denunciation of stereotypes about homosexuality to develop a positive image of male homosexuality. Joe Bengoh's initial apprehension about homosexuality evolves over the course of his maturation and life experiences, resulting in his refutation of European perspectives about a proper African heterosexual masculinity and an openness and acceptance of his sexuality. Furthermore, the chapter identifies Maddy as a site of LGBTQ pride due to his inclusion on a commemorative stained glass window in the Pride Library of the University of Western Ontario, thereby functioning as the sole representative of African literatures.

Chapter three, "Sexuality and Gender in *Woubi chéri*," explores personal relationships and forms of communication within Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire's *woubi* community. *Woubi chéri* offers an insiders perspective on non-normative sexual and gender identities within the city, the *woubi* community's language, and the process of conversation as a method of promoting knowledge and empathy. Contemporary films about LGBTQ individuals and communities in African routinely address governmental and socio-cultural forms of persecution as well as the necessity for the advancement of international human rights. *Woubi chéri*, however, provides a complex portraiture of what the community looks like, how it describes itself, and the intricacies

of individual interactions. Furthermore, the film does not suggest overall uniformity amongst its members. Financial stability comes through prostitution for some, leaving them vulnerable to sexual diseases, while others earn an income through more "respectable" means. *Woubi chéri* expands the narrative about LGBTQ Africans beyond those of persecution, revealing a fighting, surviving, and thriving community.

Chapter four addresses the relationship between sexuality and religion in Nigerian-American author Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* and Somali-British author Diriye Osman's short story collection *Fairytales for Lost Children*. These texts navigate complicated terrains of religious convictions – Christian and Muslim, respectively – in relation to queer identities. Okparanta and Osman cast faith as equally responsible for anti-homosexual violence and as a source of inspiration and hope. Numerous African LGBTQ activists are practicing Christians and Muslims, and view their spiritual beliefs as a site capable of promoting queer rights. *Under the Udala Trees* follows Ijeoma, a young Nigerian woman, from her childhood during the Nigerian Civil War, also known as the Biafran War, to adulthood, namely 13 January 2014, the date President Goodluck Jonathan signed into law the "Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act." Ijeoma resists Biblically-influenced homophobic rhetoric and reimagines possibilities to be both queer and Christian. Likewise, several of Diriye Osman's characters identify as Muslim and queer in a direct confrontation with essentialist perspectives about Somali identity. Since Somalis understand their culture as intricately entwined with Islam, to be queer not only deviates from being Muslim, it is also viewed as a refutation of Somali identity. Osman's stories, some of which contain autobiographical elements, promote spaces for queer Somali identity and celebrate possibilities of being queer and Muslim. Okparanta and Osman emphasize positive formations of queer African identities and reject the incompatibility of

spirituality and queer sexualities. *Under the Udala Trees* and *Fairytales for Lost Children* function as counternarratives to predominant homophobic rhetoric within Nigeria, Somalia, and throughout the African diaspora.

## CHAPTER ONE: "Homosexuality is un-African": Debates and Arguments about Homosexuality in Africa

A three-word phrase dominates conversations about queer Africans: "homosexuality is un-African." Its succinctness encapsulates the "confrontation of cultures" between "Africa" and "the West." Its simplicity belies its complexity: its intertwining of sexuality and African identity manufactures knowledge of an authentic, unified "Africa" and, in many cases, evokes anti-colonialist histories and rhetoric. It has been used to control "variant gender performance or sexualities, and punitive behaviour includes beating, rape, and, in some contexts, aversion therapy, forcible sex-change and even murder."<sup>59</sup> Politicians and religious leaders who spout anti-homosexuality rhetoric have transformed the phrase into a "mantra"<sup>60</sup> designed to induce "moral panics" to "distract attention from the more significant socioeconomic and political crises afflicting society."<sup>61</sup> "Homosexuality" elicits fears of neo-colonial invasion by foreign elements capable of permanently altering African cultures and identities. It normalizes heterosexuality via biology thereby deeming homosexuality unnatural and, in many cases, inhuman. "Homosexuality is un-African" conflates culture, religion, biology, and nationalism and demarcates what is and what is not African. As a result, homophobia uses several prominent methods to establish African authenticity: calls to the biopolitical preservation of the nation/continent via maintenance of the family, especially concerning the protection of children; the promotion of anti-colonialism with heterosexuality; the inherent opposition between Christianity, Islam, and indigenous spiritualities and faiths with homosexuality; and the internalization of disgust through the dehumanization and pathologization of same-sex loving individuals.

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<sup>59</sup> Zabus, Chantal. *Out in Africa*. James Currey, 2013, pp. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Tamale, Sylvia. "Homosexuality is not un-African." *Al Jazeera*. 26 April 2014.

<sup>61</sup> Tamale, Sylvia. "Confronting the Politics of Nonconforming Sexualities in Africa." *African Studies Review*, vol. 56, no. 2, September 2013, pp. 33.

Oppositional arguments promote extensive histories of sexualities, explorations of indigenous African languages, occasionally work in coordination with international human rights campaigns, and advocate for local activism. Western scholars and academics overwhelmingly dominate the discursive arenas of history, anthropology, sociology, and so forth, and produce a significant portion of research dedicated to the socio-cultural and political elaboration of variant gender and sexual identities within Africa.<sup>62</sup> African scholars are producing valuable work about local communities and reveal pertinent information about sexualities and genders unavailable to outside researchers. On a more local level, activists devise outreach programs and one-on-one informational sessions about different sexual and gender identities and to demystify homosexuality in general. Larger activist organizations, such as Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), publishes a yearly magazine titled *Bombastic* dedicated to humanizing and explaining LGBTQ Ugandans for the public at large.<sup>63</sup> The distribution of pro-same-sex materials within nations dedicated to legislating sexuality threatens state-promoted rhetoric. International governments contribute to the advancement and protection of LGBTQ human rights.<sup>64</sup> International influence has contributed to growing fears towards homosexuality as a Western importation and African activists debate whether international influences benefit or harm their

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<sup>62</sup> See, for example, the Summer 2016 issue of *Research in African Literatures*. Dedicated to queer readings of African literatures, the issue primarily includes scholars based within the United States, although the national make-up ranges globally.

<sup>63</sup> As the magazine's Editor in Chief Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera explains, Ugandan authorities "threatened to have [them] arrested and even said he would have all the published copies burnt" (3). As of writing, organizers have published two issues of *Bombastic*, both available online.

<sup>64</sup> One notable example: on 25 July 2015, United States President Barack Obama spoke in Nairobi, Kenya about the necessity of LGBTQ rights and safety. Kiran Moodley, writing for the *Independent*, quotes Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta as responding saying while Kenyans and Americans share many similar values, "some things...we must admit we don't share...It's very difficult for us to able to impose on people that which they themselves do not accept. This is why I repeatedly say that, for Kenyans, the issue of gay rights is really a non-issue."

causes.<sup>65</sup> Pro-LGBTQ African resistance methodologies are still under construction. Within African communities, survival is of utmost importance. Publically announcing oneself as queer comes with the very real possibility of violent repercussions, be they implemented by the state or by fellow citizens. Any attempt to publically reveal oneself as queer must be undertaken strategically and at opportune moments.<sup>66</sup>

The history behind "homosexuality is un-African" is complex, unwieldy, and, at times, exasperating. The promotion of an authentic African identity is based on real feelings, faiths, and attitudes that cannot be disregarded or ignored for the promise of "progress." To do so would reenact colonialist paradigms whereby the West knows best. Arguments against the phrase, on the other hand, also gravitate towards similar claims of authenticity and tradition and centralize historical evidence based within anthropological and ethnographic works, as well as linguistic conceptualizations of non-normative sexual and/or gender identities. Scholars, activists, and laypeople alike regurgitate argumentative tropes, forming a tautological cycle. Neither side listens to the other in the quest to identify what is/is not and what can/can not be African. As V.Y. Mudimbe has taught us, such quests promote the "invention of Africa." These constant drawings and re-conceptualizations from within and without replay centuries long arguments

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<sup>65</sup> Norimitsu Onishi, writing for the *New York Times*, questioned United States support of LGBTQ rights in Africa. Stated succinctly, "For many African activists, American backing is a double-edged sword." Although Onishi reports a continent-wide concern, he focuses specifically on Nigeria and its 2014 legislation criminalizing homosexuality. And yet, regardless of its geographic specificity, the statement rings true. In an interview with satirist/comedian John Oliver, Ugandan activist Pepe Julian Onziema tried to clarify whether or not American sanctions are, as Oliver questions, "helpful or harmful." Onziema states, "In my opinion, very harmful. Not just harmful but very harmful....I live on the ground, right? I know issue guidelines on what people could do and we're divided on this issue. There are people who believe sanctions will work. Some believe it won't work. I'm one of those people who believes that it doesn't work 'cause however targeted it is we are the ones who end up suffering" (Oliver).

<sup>66</sup> For extensive coverage of strategies of (in)visibility amongst queer South African and Namibian activist organizations, see Ashley Currier's *Out in Africa*.

concerned with identifying what truly is "Africa" and "African." Achille Mbembe underscores the Mudimbe's assessment within his writings on Africa and the post-colony:

I wish I could have made it clearer that what is called Africa is first and foremost a geographical accident. It is this accident that we subsequently invest with a multitude of significations, diverse imaginary contents, or even fantasies, which, by force of repetition, end up becoming authoritative narratives. As a consequence of above, what we call "Africa" could well be analysed as a formation of desires, passions and undifferentiated fantasies. It is a subjective economy that is cultivated, nurtured, disciplined and reproduced. To nurture it, to police it and to reproduce it involve an intensive work of the imagination. But it also entails a tremendous labor of bad faith social science discourse does not know how to deal with.<sup>67</sup>

The history of "homosexuality is un-African" is founded upon the imaginings of colonial governments and the promulgation of European laws and ordinances. Conversely, arguments surrounding "homosexuality is un-African" envision different notions of an African body. Mbembe's invocation of the imaginative reaches into the past and reinterprets "traditional" African cultural ideals. Any subsequent development of culturally, spiritually, and politically ordained homophobia should begin with the knowledge of how colonial powers, especially Britain, regulated African bodies. One of the clearest examples of colonial control over African sexualities was through the establishment of so-called "sodomy laws."

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<sup>67</sup> Höller, Christian and Achille Mbembe. "Africa in Motion: An Interview with the Post-Colonialism Theoretician Achille Mbembe." *Mute*. 17 March 2007.



## *Sodomy Laws in Africa*

European sodomy laws in Africa trace back to Britain's colonial government in India and the Indian Penal Code from 1861, specifically Section 377.<sup>68</sup> Ostensibly a colonial version of Britain's "Offence Against the Persons Act 1861," the law enforced a penalty of ten years to life imprisonment for any and all sexual acts deemed "against the order of nature." The law stated:

Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Explanation -- Penetration is sufficient to constitute the carnal intercourse necessary for the offence described in this section.<sup>69</sup>

Several British colonies, including Malaysia, Brunei, Sri Lanka, and Australia, enforced similar legislation against deviant sexualities. In 1885, the British government passed a law condemning "gross indecency," which is defined as "sexual acts between men outside of intercourse, and thus this provision expanded the law to prohibit not only sodomy, but sex between men in general."<sup>70</sup> Upon the acquisition of African colonies via the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, British colonial governments installed similar sodomy laws within their respective colonies. Homosexuality "had no place" in British colonial outposts since imperialism "aimed to set up respectable, loyal and

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<sup>68</sup> For an in-depth account of sodomy laws, see Alok Gupta's "This Alien Legacy: The Origins of 'Sodomy Laws' in British Colonialism."

<sup>69</sup> Qtd. in Gupta, pp. 95. In July 2009, the High Court of Delhi read down the law and ruled against its criminalization of homosexuality. This ruling did not, however, legalize homosexuality. In 2013, India's Supreme Court upheld Section 377 thereby reinstating the law. In early 2016, the Supreme Court agreed to reconsider their previous ruling.

<sup>70</sup> Faucette, Judith Avory. "Human Rights in Context: The Lessons of Section 377 Challenges for Western Gay Rights Legal Reformers in the Developing World." *The Journal of Gender, Race & Justice*, vol. 13, 2010, pp. 416.

profitable European outposts overseas, and to impart European (generally Christian) virtues to 'savages' and 'heathens.'<sup>71</sup> As Sylvia Tamale writes, "when the colonialists extended their empire to Africa, homosexuality was an offense in their own lands. Therefore it followed that such crimes were exported with imperialism, creating new offenses where they had not existed before."<sup>72</sup> Colonial legislation enforced Victoria-era heterosexual mores and punished Africans for the failure to legislate "perverse" sexualities. These laws provided "whites with models of command but also [offered] many Africans models of 'modern' behaviour."<sup>73</sup> Modern behavior equated to the adoption of Victorian moral standards, knowledge of European languages, and adherence to Christian doctrine.

Sodomy laws did more than regulate African bodies: they standardized and normalized contemporary forms of homophobia.<sup>74</sup> This has become a standard retort against assertions proclaiming homosexuality as a foreign importation and has become a popular argument for those fighting for LGBTQ rights. Marc Epprecht writes the "word *homophobia* was coined in Europe in 1969 at the time of the emergence of the modern gay rights movement and the sharp political reactions against it in the United States." He continues:

The attitudes and behaviours it describes, however, clearly existed before this.

Portugal, for example, produced crudely anti-homosexual literature in the 14th and 15th centuries. The Spanish Inquisition, from the 16th to the 18th centuries, resulted in hundreds of executions for what was termed the nefarious sin....Hatred and fear of homosexuality is thus a very old, well-established part of European

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<sup>71</sup> Aldrich, Robert. *Colonialism and Homosexuality*. Routledge, 2000, pp. 4

<sup>72</sup> Tamale. "Confronting," pp. 38.

<sup>73</sup> Ranger, Terence. "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa." *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Cambridge UP, 1985, pp. 212.

<sup>74</sup> Homophobia is defined as cultural, social and political attitudes and beliefs against homosexuality.

culture that was transplanted into Africa in sometimes sincere, and sometimes opportunistic ways.<sup>75</sup>

Homophobia has since spread throughout the continent, becoming "deeply embedded in the social fabric of Africa."<sup>76</sup> Religious institutions, such as Christianity and Islam, have also been accused of perpetuating homophobia amongst followers. Makau Mutua contests that "the first and most enduring reason for the hatred of gays is based on religious interpretations of the Abrahamic faiths – Christianity, Islam and Judaism."<sup>77</sup> Usage of the term "sodomy" by African politicians, such as Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, further signals homophobia's association with European and Christian values.<sup>78</sup> Fundamentalist Christianity in Uganda, arguably imported by American evangelical organizations, inspired the nation's "Anti-Homosexuality Bill."<sup>79</sup> Uganda's recent attempts to legislate and criminalize homosexuality invoke Christian ideology. American extremist Scott Lively, author of *The Pink Swastika*, a homophobic revisionist text of the Holocaust, and conservative preacher Lou Engle and his affiliated organization International House of Prayer (IHOP) have been accused of influencing Ugandan legislators directly involved with the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. In March 2009, Lively, along with anti-gay activists Don Schmierer and Ugandan Stephen Langa, led a "viciously homophobic" seminar dedicated to "Exposing the Homosexual Agenda" in Kampala, Uganda.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Epprecht, Marc. *Hungochani*. McGill-Queen's UP, 2004, pp. 115, 117.

<sup>76</sup> Mutua, Maka. "Sexual Orientation and Human Rights: Putting Homophobia on Trial." In *African Sexualities: A Reader*, edited by Sylvia Tamale. Pambazuka Press, 2011, pp. 452.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 459.

<sup>78</sup> Awondo, Patrick, et al. "Homophobia Africa? Toward a More Nuanced View." *African Studies Review*, vol. 55, no. 3, December 2012, pp. 148.

<sup>79</sup> See the documentary *God Loves Uganda* for an in-depth investigation into the role of American evangelical organizations and the promotion of homophobia amongst Ugandan citizens and within the Ugandan government.

<sup>80</sup> Kaoma, Kapyia. *Globalizing the Culture Wars: U.S. Conservatives, African Churches, & Homophobia*. Political Research Associates, 2009, pp. 15.

In October 2009, Ugandan MP David Bahati, who attended the seminar, introduced the first version of the Anti-Homosexuality Bill.

Furthermore, sodomy laws, alongside politically and spiritually motivated homophobia, contributed to the insidious myth of a uniquely "African homophobia." Unlike "regular" homophobia, a special form of homophobia exists within Africa. Ayo A. Coly writes of the generalized designation of African homophobia: "Homophobic Europe cannot exist because homophobia has become a conceptual cognate for Africa. There is homophobia in Europe – but Europe is not homophobic. There is homophobia in Africa – and Africa is homophobic."<sup>81</sup> So the myth goes, one cannot travel from nation to nation without recognizing interconnected forms of discrimination towards homosexuality. Regardless of culture, language, religion, or politics, homophobia encapsulates the African continent. Similarly to "homosexuality is un-African," homophobia within Africa is not a simple one-to-one transference between Europe and Africa. For the Europe/Africa relationship presumes an unwitting Africa, slowly absorbing European ideals without thought, care, or a consciously thinking African individual. Any attempt at understanding homophobia in Africa must not separate European actors from African actors, and in recent cases within Uganda, United States actors, for each participates within a history of homophobic propagation. As I discuss further, African politicians and spiritual leaders employ homophobic rhetoric to distract publics from local and state crises. In this case, homophobia becomes a pertinent tool capable of shoring political power.

The proposition "homosexuality is un-African" and its subsequent rebuttals is a battle over memory and African identity. "The struggle for memory," as Ifi Amadiume reminds us, "is

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<sup>81</sup> Coly, Ayo A. "Introduction." *African Studies Review*, vol. 56, no. 2, September 2013, pp. 22.

played out in the confrontation of cultures."<sup>82</sup> Different cultures, histories, religions, and languages participate in the defining of "Africa." On one side, the subordination and discrimination of same-sex loving individuals and communities with the express quest for eradicating a foreign concept. On the other side, activists, scholars, artists, and laypeople who struggle with the daily reality that their governments, neighbors, and faith leaders wish them gone, or, at worst, dead. The very real power behind memory is at stake, and it is a power capable of altering the future of Africa. With the importation of homophobia and anti-sodomy laws well documented, as well as the erasure of African languages and cultural practices, what has been lost in regards to African conceptions of sexuality? Harkening to Ngũgĩ's association of language with cultural memory and ongoing attempts to disremember African queer identities, how have colonizing practices and contemporary refutations of non-normative sexualities influenced the development, or lack thereof, of memory? "If we have not language to articulate queer identities in Africa, if we claim they do not exist," writes Notisha Massaquoi, "then our persecution also does not exist."<sup>83</sup> Massaquoi's calls for ways to think of modern queer Africans by advocating for historical reinvigoration, to make the past present. The following sections explore both sides of the argument and their remaking of African identities either through the expulsion or renewal of African sexualities.

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<sup>82</sup> Amadiume, Ifi. "Prophecy, Authenticity, Oppositional Models: Writers and Politics in Africa." *CR: The New Centennial Review* vol. 3, no. 3, Fall 2003, pp. 18.

<sup>83</sup> Massaquoi, Notisha. "The Continent as a Closet: The Making of an African Queer Theory." *Outliers* vol. 1, no. 1, 2008, pp. 53.

*Homosexuality is un-African, or, "Is that the best gay porn they could find?"*

This section addresses antagonistic rhetorical methods designed to render queer Africans "un-African." I provide a brief overview of contemporary forms of homophobic rhetoric as used by African political and spiritual leaders.

In mid-February 2010, Martin Ssempe, a Ugandan pastor and member of the National Task Force, a Ugandan organization dedicated to the eradication and criminalization of homosexuality, publically projected graphic male pornography to his congregants, along with several curious observers, at the Makerere Community Church in Kampala, Uganda. The possession of pornography is illegal under Ugandan law. However, he sidetracked this issue as he received a "special license" which allowed him to screen pornography without any legal repercussions.<sup>84</sup> Three hundred people were in attendance as Ssempe, along with a translator, explained images that required no explanation.<sup>85</sup> Ssempe's descriptions on that occasion were not recorded. However, he has given similar presentations over the years, all of which used identical language. In the 2011 BBC documentary *The World's Worst Place to Be Gay* as well as the documentary *God Loves Uganda*, Ssempe attacks what homosexuals "do in their bedrooms." He makes his case through explicit male pornography. He accompanies his descriptions by physically miming the acts. For example, he describes "anal licking" which he "performs" by making a fist to mimic the anus and then proceeds to lick his hand. *God Loves Uganda* offers an extended version of his lecture: after some tame descriptions – touching and caressing – he comments on how men insert their fists into each other and, "as if that is not enough," he shows a man "licking another man's anus" as though it were "ice cream." As per all three events,

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<sup>84</sup> "ANALYST: Porn coming to a church near you." *The Observer* [Uganda]. 24 February 2010.

<sup>85</sup> Luirink, Bart and Madaeleine Maurick. *Homosexuality in Africa: A Disturbing Love*. Translated by Christopher Chambers. Uitgeverij Aspekt, 2016, pp. 150.

responses by audience members were remarkably similar regardless of where or when the screening occurs. Members cover their ears, close their eyes, and shake their heads, refusing to believe what they hear and see. As for the 2010 public screening, members objected to Ssempea's "poor taste." This rather vague assessment may refer to his crude depictions of male homosexuality or, as one audience member observed, Ssempea's preference for male pornography. "Is that the best gay porn he could find?" retorted one male observer. "I was waiting to see lesbians doing it but...he only showed men!"<sup>86</sup> While the observer's humorous remarks diffused Ssempea's fiery denouncement of homosexuality, the fact remains that Ssempea received permission from the government to promote homophobia amongst Ugandans. He used his pulpit to instill disgust towards homosexuality amongst his congregants, and, in using a sacred space to do so, interconnects spirituality with disgust/homophobia.<sup>87</sup> In later sermons, Ssempea questioned the intentions of United States President Barack Obama for spreading LGBTQ rights into Africa, asking, "is this what he wants to bring to Africa?"<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> "ANALYST: Porn coming to church near you."

<sup>87</sup> Retired Bishop Christopher Ssenyonjo was excommunicated from the Anglican church for his support of LGBTQ Ugandans. He offers ministry to sexual minorities, speaks at international conferences, and, to use Marcia Oliver's words, urges "people to understand the complexities of human sexuality and, above all, to love one another as God loves all human beings" (87). See Marcia Oliver's "Transnational Sex Politics, Conservative Christianity, and Antigay Activism in Uganda."

<sup>88</sup> Ugandan activists Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG) are currently pursuing a lawsuit against United States-based evangelical extremist Scott Lively "for his role in the persecution of LGBTI people in Uganda, in particular his active participation in the conspiracy to strip away their fundamental rights." In 2015, SMUG requested a court order subpoena after learning of Ssempea's U.S. citizenship. Whether or not he receives the subpoena is unknown since he is currently in hiding. See the Center for Constitutional Rights' webpage dedicated to the lawsuit. Additionally, the website includes an extensive timeline of events.

The internalization of homophobic disgust has become one of the most effective methods for promoting the criminalization of homosexuality.<sup>89</sup> Disgust mechanisms – nausea, revulsion, concerns for cleanliness – are defensive measures designed to prevent the body from imbibing potentially harmful objects, namely consumable objects.<sup>90</sup> Bodily fluids and excretions, such as blood, feces, urine, and pus, are some of the more common objects associated with disgust. Insects, such as maggots, whose affiliation with the decay of organic bodies, elicit disgust, as do vermin, such as rats, for their transference of potentially harmful and deadly diseases. These sources of disgust also illicit fear since both fear and disgust "have in common approximately the same degree of immediacy, and also the character of being in a narrower sense attitudes of defense."<sup>91</sup> In many cases, these disgusting objects travel cross-culturally. Some disgusting objects, such as food products and cuisines, do not, thus making disgust "pancultural and culturally variant."<sup>92</sup> Disgust, then, comprises of biological as well as socially determined responses. "The social molding of the emotion," argues Carolyn Korsmeyer, "certainly lends a cognitive framework to its employment."<sup>93</sup> Martha Nussbaum's concept of "projective disgust," a helpful tool to understand how objects and other humans become disgusting objects, stems from a "double fantasy: a fantasy of the dirtiness of the other and a fantasy of one's own purity. Both

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<sup>89</sup> For a preliminary exploration of moral disgust and its affiliations with homophobia, see Meredith L. Weiss and Michael J. Bosla's *Global Homophobia: States, Movements, and the Politics of Oppression*; Bumni O. Olatunji's "Disgust, Scrupulosity and Conservative Attitudes About Sex: A Meditational Model of Homophobia"; H.A. Chapman, et. al's "In Bad Taste: Evidence for the Oral Origins of Moral Disgust"; and Joshua Gert's "Disgust, Moral Disgust, and Morality."

<sup>90</sup> See Aurel Kolani's philosophical tract *On Disgust*. Kolani's work offers one of the first extensive explorations into moral disgust.

<sup>91</sup> Kolani, Aurel. *On Disgust*, edited by Carolyn Korsmeyer and Barry Smith, Open Court, 2004, pp. 33

<sup>92</sup> Korsmeyer, Carolyn. "Disgust and Aesthetics." *Philosophy Compass* vol. 7, no. 11, 2012, pp. 754.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 755.



sides of the projection involve false belief, and both conduce to a politics of hierarchy."<sup>94</sup>

Ssempe's dramatic recreation of male sexual acts, his hyperbolic language, and depiction of explicit male pornography reinforced homosexuality as inherently disgusting. He participated in this double fantasy whereby he and his congregants represented purity and holiness while homosexuality, through its connection with base human waste products, represented pure disgust.

There is a relationship between the maintenance of cultural authenticity through biopolitical preservation of life and the invocation of disgust.<sup>95</sup> Goals of the biopolitical state, as Gregory Tomso argues, are to "preserve and foster life for the sake of strengthening the state and sustaining its economic well-being."<sup>96</sup> The protection of life requires the eradication of any and all enemies of life. The spread of homosexuality is likened with disease whereby homosexuality infects and destroys healthy bodies. But homosexuality does not simply kill the body; homosexuality threatens the very possibility of the future. Homosexuals threaten the sanctity of the family through their lack of reproduction, brainwashing techniques and initiation of young children into inherently deviant lifestyles with the goal to eradicate African cultures. In this respect, heterosexual reproduction equals reproduction of culture. Open hostility towards

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<sup>94</sup> Nussbaum, Martha C. *From Disgust to Humanity: Sexual Orientation and Constitutional Law*. Oxford UP, 2010, pp. 17.

<sup>95</sup> See Tavia Nyong'o's "Queer Africa and the Fantasy of Virtual Participation" where he connects Achille Mbembe's necropolitics with international responses to media responses – mass and social media – to Uganda's anti-homosexuality legislation. Rather than reinforce "stereotypes of a violent Africa," Nyong'o invokes necropolitics to "question, rather than ratify the stereotyped horror" perpetuated by Western media (41). Neville Hoad, speaking at the inaugural "Directions in African Queer Studies" conference in London, Ontario, proposed the term "erotopolitics" which, as he tentatively suggested, would constitute as the finishing piece of a triumvirate: biopolitics, necropolitics, and erotopolitics.

<sup>96</sup> Tomso, Gregory. "Viral Sex and the Politics of Life." *South Atlantic Quarterly* vol. 107, no. 2, Spring 2008, pp. 187.

homosexuality in the name of the family, children, and biopolitical preservation revolve around tradition and the maintenance of traditional socio-cultural norms.

Political leaders commonly dehumanize LGBTQ Africans by equating them with animals and life-threatening diseases. A vocal opponent of homosexuality, The Gambia's President Yahya Jammeh, called homosexuals "vermin" which must be fought "the same way we are fighting malaria-causing mosquitoes, if not more aggressively."<sup>97</sup> In January 2016, Malawian<sup>98</sup> politician Ken Msonda, a member of the conservative People's Party, posted a message to his Facebook account where he called homosexuals "worse than dogs."<sup>99</sup> President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, one of the most outspoken opponents of LGBTQ rights, expelled GALZ (Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe) from the Zimbabwean International Book Fair in 1995.<sup>100</sup> Days later at a Heroes Day rally for veterans of the Zimbabwe liberation struggle in Harare, Mugabe rearticulated his anti-homosexuality viewpoints: 'If dogs and pigs don't do it, why must human beings? Can human beings be human beings if they do worse than pigs?'<sup>101</sup> Although he banned the organization and called homosexuals "sodomists" and "sexual perverts," the Zimbabwean

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<sup>97</sup> Saul, Heather. "Gambian President says gay people are 'vermin' and should be tackled like malaria-causing mosquitoes." *Independent* [London]. 19 February 2014.

<sup>98</sup> In 2010, a couple was arrested, found guilty, and sentenced to fourteen years imprisonment for unnatural acts and gross indecency. A *New York Times* article identified Twionge Chimbalanga and Steven Monjeza as a "gay couple," even though one identified herself as a woman. The U.S. State Department expressed displeasure with the ruling and called it a "step backwards in the protection of human rights." Ten days after sentencing, Malawian President Bingu wa Mutharika pardoned the couple after extensive international pressure. See "Malawi gay couple released after presidential pardon" and "Malawi gay couple get maximum sentence of 14 years."

<sup>99</sup> Kakande, Austin. "Ken Msonda Defiant: Tells MLS 'Just Declare Your Sexual Orientation.'" *Malawi Voice*. 5 January 2016.

<sup>100</sup> Aarmo, Margrete. "How Homosexuality Became 'Un-African': The Case of Zimbabwe." *Female Desires: Same-Sex Relations and Transgender Practices Across Cultures*, edited by Evelyn Blackwood and Saskia E. Wieringa. Columbia UP, 1999, pp. 255-280.

<sup>101</sup> Hoad, pp. xi.

Supreme Court declared that GALZ would be allowed to exhibit at future book fairs.<sup>102</sup> In subsequent years, homosexuals transformed into "gangsters,"<sup>103</sup> and then in 2000, an "abomination, a rottenness of culture."<sup>104</sup> Mugabe continues to reaffirm the un-African nature of homosexuality. On 28 September 2015, Mugabe spoke at the United Nation General Assembly meeting in New York City. During the speech, he declared, "we are not gays," with the "we" comprising all of Africa. Mugabe rejected non-African ideals and adopted anti-colonialist rhetoric whereby mutual respect for different cultures advances human rights: "We equally reject attempts to prescribe new rights that are contrary to our norms, values, traditions, and beliefs. We are not gays. Cooperation and respect for each other will advance the cause of human rights worldwide. Confrontation, vilification and double standards will not."<sup>105</sup> Neville Hoad, invoking Mugabe's infamous remarks, observes that "African nationalism [has become] a site of displaced resistance to a perceived encroachment on neocolonial nationalism by forces of globalization."<sup>106</sup> On the one hand, Mugabe consolidates his remarks within history and memory. Violating tradition equals violating memory. Western powers, Mugabe declares, enforce rights and ideals incompatible with Zimbabwean/African tradition. The dual linkage between Zimbabwe and Africa arises through his usage of "we," an ambiguous posture that conflates a single African nation with the entirety of Africa. Jammeh employs similar rhetoric, too, invoking the nationalist/continental "we." This link cannot be overstated for several of chosen works

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<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, pp. xi.

<sup>103</sup> In 1999, British LGBTQ activist and leader of OutRage! Peter Tatchell along with two other members, attempted to arrest Mugabe while he travelled on a "private shopping trip" throughout London. According to the BBC, Tatchell and the two other members "pounced on a car in which Mr Mugabe [*sic*] was travelling." See "UK Gay activist freed after Mugabe row."

<sup>104</sup> Epprecht, Marc. *Hungochani: The History of Dissident Sexuality in Southern Africa*. McGill-Queen's UP, pp. 4.

<sup>105</sup> Justice, Adam. "One of Africa's longest-ruling dictators just doubled down on his anti-gay stance." *Business Insider*. 29 Sept. 2015.

<sup>106</sup> Hoad, Neville. *African Intimacies*. University of Minnesota Press, 2004, pp. 77.

embellish the fluid interchangeability between nation and continent, perhaps most notably in Yulisa Amadu Maddy's *No Past, No Present, No Future*.

South African leaders promoted homophobic rhetoric regardless of South Africa being one of the most progressive nations concerning LGBTQ rights. One predominate example occurred in 2006 as South Africans fought for the legalization of same-sex marriage. At the time, South African President Jacob Zuma declared that same-sex marriages could not be tolerated "in any normal society." Harkening back to his childhood, Zuma continued, "When I was growing up an *ungqingli* [gay person] would not have stood in front of me. I would knock him out."<sup>107</sup> On a different occasion, Zuma called same-sex marriage a "disgrace to the Nation and to God." For many South Africans, as the representative of the Constitution of South Africa, one of the more "progressive" constitutions in its protection of sexual minorities, Zuma's inflammatory remarks signified a significant failure of leadership.<sup>108</sup> The now-defunct Joint Working Group, an organization dedicated to the protection of LGBTQ South Africans, labeled Zuma's comments as "form of hate speech."<sup>109</sup> Zuma immediately apologized for his remarks, noting his comments "were made in the context of the traditional way of raising children." Zuma's comments did not

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<sup>107</sup> Vincent, L. "Moral Panic and the Politics of Populism." *Representations* vol. 45, no. 2, 2009, pp. 216-7.

<sup>108</sup> Signed by former president Nelson Mandela in December 1996 and came into effect in February 1997, the Constitution of South Africa protects same-sex loving individuals from discrimination, one of the first constitutions in the world to guarantee such protections. Mikki van Zyl analyzed the Constitution of South Africa and its ability to produce effective social and cultural changes to "ensure livable lives" for LGBTQ South Africans. See Xavier Livermon's "Queer(y)ing Freedom: Black Queer Visibilities in Postapartheid South Africa"; Henriette Gunkel's "'What's Identity Got To Do With It?' Rethinking Intimacy and Homosociality in Contemporary South Africa"; and Mark Gressiver's biographical *Lost and Found in Johannesburg* for studies of homosexuality and queerness in South Africa.

<sup>109</sup> See "Zuma apologises for gay comments." *BBC.co.uk*. 28 Sept. 2006.

prevent the passage of the Civil Union Act that legally allowed two individuals to file for marriage or a civil union partnership.<sup>110</sup>

Religious beliefs have contributed to homophobic rhetoric amongst African politicians, especially within Nigeria and Uganda. Before signing into law Uganda's anti-homosexuality legislation, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni expressed reservations. His apprehension may have stemmed from a genuine lack of knowledge about homosexuality or was merely an appeasement towards international observers. Upon the Uganda's National Assembly passage of the law, Museveni ordered the Ministry of Health to compose a scientific research report on homosexuality. Eleven members made up the "Ministerial Scientific Committee on Homosexuality," all of whom work or once worked in science related fields.<sup>111</sup> Released on 10 February 2014, the report affirmed the existence of homosexuality and denied presumptions that homosexuality is a European importation. On the contrary, what is at stake is "sexual exhibitionism."<sup>112</sup> According to the authors, sexual exhibitionism, "both heterosexual and

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<sup>110</sup> For a wide swath of perspectives on South Africa's Civil Union Act, see David Bilchitz and Melanie Judge's "For Whom Does the Bell Toll? The Challenges and Possibilities of the Civil Union Act for Family Law in South Africa"; N. Ntlama's "A Brief Overview of the Civil Union Act"; Bradley S. Smith and J.A. Robinson's "The South African *Civil Union Act* 2006: Progressive Legislation with Regressive Implications?"; Helen Kruuse's "Conscientious Objection to Performing Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa"; and Jacqueline Heaton's "The Right to Same-Sex Marriage in South Africa."

<sup>111</sup> The committee is as follows: Dr. Jane Ruth Aceng, Director of General Health Services; Dr. Isaac Ezati, Director of Planning and Development; Dr. Jacinto Amandua, Commissioner of Clinical Services; Dr. Sheila Ndyabangi, Head of the Mental Health Desk; Dr. Seggane Musisi, a professor of Psychiatry at Makerere University; Dr. Eugene Kinyanda, Head of the Mental Health Project at the Medical Research Council; Dr. David Basangwa, Director of Butabika Hospital; Dr. Sylvester Onzivua, a Senior Pathologist at Mulago Hospital; Dr. Misaki Wayengera, a geneticist at Makerere University; Dr. Paul Bangirana, a clinical psychologist at Makerere University; and Dr. Wilson Byarugaba, a retired professor and former Head of Human and Molecular Genetics at Makerere University.

<sup>112</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.pambazuka.org/food-health/uganda-scientific-statement-ministry-health-homosexuality>.

homosexual, is alien and repugnant to most African cultures."<sup>113</sup> Pre-colonial African cultures controlled sexuality and allowed individuals who may now be identified as homosexual to exist without the threat of punishment or negatively influencing society. However, with the rise of "sexual exhibitionism," governments must take necessary steps to protect "vulnerable populations" – i.e. children. Although the authors insert heterosexuality into the mix, they fall back upon the myth of the predatory homosexual: "African cultures had contained sexual vices. Maybe we need to revisit them to contain the present explosion of overt and coercive homosexual activity with the exploitation of our young children."<sup>114</sup> The existence of homosexuality is not their concern; rather, it is the expansion of homosexuality's "overt and coercive" influence within African societies. The report's "scientific" approach renews arguments of a homosexual takeover and, thus, the destruction of family, nation and future.<sup>115</sup> With the approval of the scientific community, Museveni signed the Anti-Homosexuality Bill into law as a measure to protect and preserve future generations. Upon signing the bill into law, Museveni called homosexuals "disgusting."

The report fears the eradication of African tradition. African leaders invoke tradition and traditional ways of being during arguments against human rights for LBGTQ. Chris Dunton and Mai Palmberg summarize how tradition is used against the acceptance of homosexuality:

A word that is often use in stigmatizing homosexuality in Africa is 'tradition' – the argument being that homosexual relations are incompatible with traditional

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<sup>113</sup> *ibid.*, n.p.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, n.p.

<sup>115</sup> Misaki Wayengera, one of the report's co-authors, denounced international accusations that he and his fellow scientists "misused" science "to justify Ugandan antigay law." In response, he wrote, "[s]ome say we could have chosen to boycott participation altogether. I believe that if scientists had refused to carry out this research because we feared (rightfully) that our work would be misrepresented, we would have failed to do our duty as experts, which is to inform the public." See "Uganda Homosexuality Report in Context."

African social practice. But there is such a thing as 'the invention of tradition' – that is, the manufacture, or at least simplification, of ideas about traditional practice in order to serve the interests of particular groups, or to provide a politically convenient and sanitised reading of history and of the nature of specific communities.<sup>116</sup>

Tradition glosses over specificities. It is a "simplification" of complex socio-cultural histories with the intention of simultaneously promoting a presentist perspective as well as a centuries-long comprehension of African identity. Tradition, then, is a tool designed to eradicate untoward thoughts and ideas. As the above report suggests that although homosexuality is not foreign to Africa, the current spread of international LGBTQ rights is reminiscent to colonialism and threatens African ideals and traditions.

Connections between homosexuality, disgust, and spirituality suggest that the physical body is not the only "thing" worth protecting. Homophobia and homophobic acts protect bodies, specifically male bodies, from emasculation and negate challenges to hegemonic African masculinity.<sup>117</sup> In this case, as Kopano Ratele writes, hegemonic masculinity in Africa is rendered complicated for African masculinity is "hegemonic and subordinate" to capitalist white patriarchy "at the same time."<sup>118</sup> Ssempe aligns his explicit depictions of male pornography – all of the men featured are white – with LGBTQ human rights rhetoric and Western political

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<sup>116</sup> Dunton, Chris and Mai Palmberg. *Human Rights and Homosexuality in Southern Africa*. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996, pp. 24.

<sup>117</sup> Hegemonic masculinity is defined as "the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just as a set of role expectations or an identity) that allow...men's dominance over women to continue. Hegemonic masculinity [is] distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinities [is] not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it [is] certainly normative. It embodie[s] all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimate[s] the global subordination of women to men" (qtd. in Ratele, pp. 117-8).

<sup>118</sup> Ratele, pp. 118.

pressures designed to enforce said rights thereby simultaneously reclaiming male African bodies from white sexual perversions and reaffirming heterosexual African masculinity. Counteractions against homophobia must somehow destroy internalized feelings of disgust as well as determine different methods for reaffirming African masculinity as inherently distinct from the ambiguous notion of "Western masculinity."<sup>119</sup>

So far, I have largely focused on male homosexuality. Female homosexuality, while prevalent, has not undergone as extensive demonization as male homosexuality nor has it received similar levels of scholarly, academic attention. This, however, is slowly changing. Wendy Belcher's expertly researched *The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros*, an expansive exploration of the seventeenth-century female Ethiopian saint Walatta Petros and her same-sex partner, signals the beginning of new historical work into both indigenous African language texts and advancements into queer African histories. Nevertheless, an extensive portion of research typically addresses contemporary lesbian, trans\*, and queer communities in South Africa, particularly social and male responses to same-sex loving women. One primary issue is the act of corrective rape, also known as curative rape. But, to be clear, not all women who experience curative rape identify as lesbian. As South African LGBTQ activist Zethu Matebeni points out, "[m]arking out certain groups of a special kind of crime can make them vulnerable to

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<sup>119</sup> Also see Anita Padmanabhanunni and David Edwards' "Victimisation in the Lives of Lesbian-Identified Women in South Africa: Implications for Clinical Assessment and Treatment"; Amanda Lock Swarr's "Paradoxes of Butchness: Lesbian Masculinities and Sexual Violence in Contemporary South Africa"; Rachel A. Lewis' "Queering Vulnerability: Visualizing Black Lesbian Desire in Post-Apartheid South Africa"; Gabeba Baderoon's "'I Compose Myself': Lesbian Muslim Autobiographies and the Craft of Self-Writing in South Africa"; René Koraan and Allison Geduld's "'Corrective Rape' of Lesbians in the Era of Transformative Constitutionalism in South Africa"; and Maudri Wheal and Lea Mwambene's "Realisation or oversight of a constitutional mandate? Corrective rape of black African lesbians in South Africa"; Dipika Nath's report for Human Rights Watch "'We'll Show You You're a Woman': Violence and Discrimination against Black Lesbians and Transgender Men in South Africa" and Ashley Currier's "Transgender Invisibility in Namibian and South African LGBT Organizing."



unintended further victimization. Knowing that a victim has experienced curative rape immediately identifies her as lesbian, a category many (including certain institutions) still treat with disdain."<sup>120</sup> Furthermore, trans men also undergo sexual retribution to reinforce African masculinities and strict gender binaries.<sup>121</sup> The stories of same-sex loving women remain underrepresented in comparison to same-sex loving men, especially considering new forms of legislation typically address same-sex loving men. Women are no less vulnerable than men to forms of violent retribution, but their stories are told with less frequency.

Former African heads of state have spoken against anti-homosexuality legislation. Former Botswanan President Festus Mogae, who has a history of supporting HIV/AIDS prevention amongst LGBTQ communities, spoke at the same U.N. General Meeting as Mugabe and addressed legal and social improvements for LGBTQ Africans.<sup>122</sup> In a separate interview, Mogae distances himself from Mugabe:

It's not surprising that we [Robert Mugabe and Mogae] appear to be speaking from different corners of the mouth. Differences in opinion are welcome. While I

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<sup>120</sup> Matebeni, Zethu. "Deconstructing Violence Towards Black Lesbians in South Africa." *Queer African Reader*, edited by Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas, Pambazuka Press, pp. 346.

<sup>121</sup> Also see Anita Padmanabhanunni and David Edwards' "Victimisation in the Lives of Lesbian-Identified Women in South Africa: Implications for Clinical Assessment and Treatment"; Lettia Smuts' "Coming Out as a Lesbian in Johannesburg, South Africa: Considering Intersecting Identities and Social Spaces"; Amanda Lock Swarr's "Paradoxes of Butchness: Lesbian Masculinities and Sexual Violence in Contemporary South Africa"; Rachel A. Lewis' "Queering Vulnerability: Visualizing Black Lesbian Desire in Post-Apartheid South Africa"; Gabeba Baderoon's "'I Compose Myself': Lesbian Muslim Autobiographies and the Craft of Self-Writing in South Africa"; René Koraan and Allison Geduld's "'Corrective Rape' of Lesbians in the Era of Transformative Constitutionalism in South Africa"; and Maudri Wheal and Lea Mwambene's "Realisation or oversight of a constitutional mandate? Corrective rape of black African lesbians in South Africa"; the Human Rights Watch report "'We'll Show You You're a Woman': Violence and Discrimination against Black Lesbians and Transgender Men in South Africa" and Ashley Currier's "Transgender Invisibility in Namibian and South African LGBT Organizing."

<sup>122</sup> In a statement from July 2012, Mogae condemned anti-homosexual legislation for its forcing "men who have sex with men...into secrecy."

admit that the West often push their agendas on Africa, which we must be wary of, I also believe that we must, as Africans, admit that the world is changing and we must move with the times. This means often abandoning some of our long-held convictions about life, if the need arises. In my long interaction with LGBT groups and extensive research, I have come to the realisation that we are limited in our knowledge and must be open to new discoveries. I have been converted; I used to hold the same beliefs as my counterparts. President Mugabe has said that he hates homosexuals and is on record as saying they are worse than pigs and dogs. That is still his position. Leadership is not always about you, it is about people and often circumstances. I call upon African leaders to open up to second-generation rights.<sup>123</sup>

Mogae's response stems from an empathetic understanding of how LGBTQ communities undergo extensive persecution. He does not couch his acceptance of LGBTQ individuals and communities within Western ideals; rather, Mogae stresses his personal interactions with queer Africans. Mugabe supporters castigated Mogae for his remarks. Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU–PF) youth leader Pupurai Togarepi told Mogae to focus on "gaps in Botswana politics and leave us alone," while the Zimbabwean National Liberation War Veterans Association, mediated through secretary-general Cde Victor Matemadanda declared, "[w]hen President Mugabe denounces homosexuals he was representing the people of Zimbabwe, and an attack directed at him is an assault on Zimbabweans."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Pheage, Tefo. "Good leadership is about people – Festus Mogae." *African Renewal*. 7 Dec. 2015.

<sup>124</sup> See "War Vets Blast Mogae" and Richard Chidza's "Shut up, Zanu-PF Tells Mogae."

To conclude: arguments against homosexuality demonize homosexuals as destroyers of heterosexual reproduction and thus culture; dehumanize homosexuals as animals and diseases; reinforce homophobic perspectives through the usage of disgust; and equate anti-homosexual politics with anti-colonial/anti-imperialist politics.

### *Homosexuality is African*

This section outlines strategies and methods of African LGBTQ activism and scholarship. I focus on efforts to reclaim erased queer identities within African contexts. The succeeding section specifically addresses the relationship between queer theory and Africa, the growth of African queer scholarship, and potential issues with Queer African Studies as an intellectual discourse.

A simple counter-argument is homosexuality *is* African. The popular phrase – homosexuals are "born this way" – discharges attacks based on authenticity and tradition. No other evidence is required as the individual proclaims their sexuality as innate, present at birth and incapable of being erased. Potentially essentialist in its promotion of an inborn universal gay identity, "born this way" undercuts homophobic arguments depicting the conscious spread and adoption of Western sexual ideologies by queer Africans. Furthermore, declaring homosexuality as inborn reaffirms a sense of humanity that is routinely undercut by African leaders. "The development of 'born this way,'" writes Jeffrey Bennett, "has been an effective tool for LGBT people and their allies, shifting the terms of the debate from contemptuous perversity to that of rights-based secularism."<sup>125</sup> The maxim, however, "can never account for all forms of gender and

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<sup>125</sup> Bennett, Jeffrey. "'Born This Way': Queer Vernacular and the Politics of Origins." *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, vol. 11, no. 3, September 2014, pp. 214.

sexual identification, cultural contexts, or more fluid understandings of sexuality and gender."<sup>126</sup> The development of anti-homophobic politics within an African context requires extensive research into queer African histories and lexicons, as well as how cultures addressed gender fluid individuals. Regardless of the prominence of "born this way" as a motto dedicated to the promotion of LGBTQ human rights, its global universalization glosses over socio-cultural differences and may reinforce homophobic arguments that decry homosexuality as a Western import.

The presence of homosexuality in Africa continues to inspire debate amongst academics. Of late, anthropologists and ethnographers from the global North have excavated pre-colonial African gender and sexual identities in an attempt to defuse arguments of essentialist claims of African heterosexual authenticity. Investigations typically delve into pre-colonial histories, such as gender and sexual identities and their linguistic apparatus, and colonial methodologies for eradicating improper moralities.<sup>127</sup> Additionally, scholars have grappled with how indigenous languages may correlate with Western notions of "homosexuality."<sup>128</sup> For example, the isiZulu word *hlabonga* and Kiswahili word *ushoga*, terms affiliated with same-sex sexualities, indicate the pre-colonial presence of homosexuality in Africa. Deborah P. Amory notes, "The fact of the matter is that there is a long history of diverse African peoples engaging in same-sex relations...Indeed, evidence suggests that it was the historical processes of colonization and

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<sup>126</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 215.

<sup>127</sup> A brief sampling includes Zackie Achmat's "'Apostles of Civilised Vice': 'Immoral Practices' and 'Unnatural Vice' in South African Prisons and Compounds, 1890-1920"; Emmanuel K. Akyeampong's "Sexuality and prostitution among the Akan of the Gold Coast, c. 1650-1950"; and Signe Arnfred's "African Sexuality/Sexuality in Africa: Tales and Silences."

<sup>128</sup> Will Roscoe and Stephen O. Murray's collection *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands* offers several essays dedicated to linguistic anthropology. Some of the essays that address language include Deborah P. Amory's "*Mashoga, Mabasha, and Magai*: 'Homosexuality' on the East African Coast"; Rudolf P. Gaudio's "Male Lesbians and Other Queers Notions in Hausa"; and Nil Ajen's "West African Homoeroticism: West African Men."

missionization that consistently altered African sexual practices.”<sup>129</sup> For many scholars, language provides relevant evidence about the history of sexuality on the continent. In *How to Be a Real Gay*, Graeme Reid notes how socio-linguistic parameters establish gender and sexual identities and practices within rural South African villages. English-based terms *gent* and *lady* play upon "active" and "passive" male same-sex sexualities, respectively, while “gay” and “lesbian” function as secondary concepts.<sup>130</sup> *Inkotshoane* among the Shangaan in southern Africa or *motsoalle* amongst Basotho women in modern-day South Africa describes female "same-sex erotics."<sup>131</sup> Stella Nyanzi's work on same-sex loving Ugandans centralized voices "from below" who "reclaimed and appropriated [the label "homosexual"] for themselves": "I commonly encountered the expression '*Nze ndi homo!*' – meaning 'I am a homo!' During gathering, spokespersons variously stated: '*Ffe ba homo...*' – meaning 'For us, homosexuals...'. It was a solidarity-enforcing label appropriated by insiders when in homo-friendly company or safe spaces."<sup>132</sup> Some Ugandans have taken to appropriate terms from the Global North for community building as opposed to identifying with Western sexual identity ideologies. Community members' specific sexual identities fit their needs.

The "discovery" of indigenous terms is not without its detractors. Ifi Amadiume questions quests for the equivalency of Western sexual identities within African contexts due to its imperialistic connotations.<sup>133</sup> Kwame Essien and Saheed Aderinto note how "[l]inguistic

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<sup>129</sup> Amory, Deborah P. "'Homosexuality' in Africa: Issues and Debates." *Issue: A Journal of Opinion*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1997, pp. 5.

<sup>130</sup> Reid, Graeme. *How to Be a Real Gay: Gay Identities in Small-Town South Africa*. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2013, pp. 9-10. One conversation revealed that if two *ladys* – passive male partners – were to become a couple, they would then qualify themselves as “lesbians.”

<sup>131</sup> Tamale. "Confronting," pp. 35

<sup>132</sup> Nyanzi, pp. 958.

<sup>133</sup> Amadiume, Ifi. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*, Zed Books, 1987, pp. 8.

patterns and actual practices do not always correlate and vary from culture to culture."<sup>134</sup> J. Jack Halberstam resists attempts to co-opt indigenous terms for the sake of confirming Western sexual identities, writing that "the notion that other languages should have a word that signifies female sexual variance in a way that corresponds to the English term 'lesbian,' repeats the very global hierarchy" of the term "queer."<sup>135</sup> British-Somali author Diriye Osman incorporates Swahili terms, such as *shoga*, alongside and in replacement of Western terminology. Like the Afrikaner term *moffie*, Osman defines *shoga* as "faggot." Yet his characters adopt and identify as *shoga*, much like "queer" was adopted and reframed by LGBTQ communities in the Global North and within academic communities. Deborah Amory's expansive research into queer communities on Africa's east coast includes an examination into *shoga* [pl. *mashoga*]. Since Swahili does not allow "gender cannot be communicated grammatically through the use of a pronoun," Amory notes that individual usage of *shoga* typically involves the "assignment or choice of [female] nicknames or stage names."<sup>136</sup> This results in *shoga*'s association with cisgender<sup>137</sup> men whose gendered behaviors align with feminine roles.<sup>138</sup> Perhaps one of the best ways to understand indigenous terms is throughout their narrative inclusion, enlivening them, transforming them into living words. By doing so, indigenous and Western terms work in conjunction with one another whereby neither one becomes predominate. If we are to dedicate attention solely to indigenous words without providing historical contextualization, then we risk

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<sup>134</sup> Aderinto, Saheed and Kwame Essien. "'Cutting the Head of the Roaring Monster': Homosexuality and Repression in Africa." *African Study Monographs*, vol. 30, no. 3, September 2009, pp. 126.

<sup>135</sup> Halberstam, J. Jack. *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender and the End of Normal*. Beacon Press, 2013, pp. 130.

<sup>136</sup> Amory, Deborah. "*Mashoga, Mabasha, and Magai: 'Homosexuality' on the East African Coast.*" *Boy-Wives and Female Husbands*, edited by Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe, Palgrave, 1998, pp. 78.

<sup>137</sup> Cisgender refers to any person who identifies with their birth sex.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 78-84.

promoting static conceptions of African cultures thereby replaying orientalist fantasies of a pure, untouched Africa.

So where does "queer" fit and what does it mean to be a "queer African"?

Alterations, shake-ups, and revisions are necessary for the survival of any discourse. Anthropologists Aimee Cox and Dana-Ain Davis assert that “the present moment will always demand new politics that not only undermine the taken for grantedness of normative ways of being, but also continually engage in alternative meaning making as well as alternative ways of identifying and confronting power.”<sup>139</sup> Cox and Davis note how applied anthropologists have attempted to translate multiple African conceptualizations of same-sex and nonnormative sexualities into contemporary political projects. Socio-cultural histories provide “alternative ways of identifying and confronting power.” As exemplified in the works of Marc Epprecht and Neville Hoad, contemporary African governments frequent use of colonial-era legislature and "traditional" conceptualizations of African sexuality to perpetuate heterosexual normativity. Their observations mirror Abiola Irele’s demands of the “African scholar,” noting the scholarly process as “one that is undergoing an intense process of transformation, and therefore in need of new directions of thought, of expression, and ultimately of action.”<sup>140</sup> Robert H. Bates, V.Y. Mudimbe and Jean O'Barr support Irele’s position: “The exposure of the received knowledge of the disciplines to materials out of Africa introduces doubt and compels revision. It unsettles and

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<sup>139</sup> Cox, Aimee and Dana-Ain Davis. "Extraordinary Intersections." *Transforming Anthropology*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1.

<sup>140</sup> Irele, Abiola. *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*. Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 57.

disorganizes and, in doing so, promotes intellectual growth.”<sup>141</sup> The advent of Queer African Studies is an attempt to unsettle predominantly white-dominated Western discourses.

The question remains: how will "queer" fit amongst studies of African discourses, ideologies, religions, etc.? In her introduction to the short story collection *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction*, Pumla Dineo Gqola suggests that there are “very many ways in which being queer in Africa, a queer Africa and queering Africa are not the same thing across time, borders, and internal boundaries, even as we read ‘queer’ as always concerned with identity and a deliberate perspective in/on the world.”<sup>142</sup> Her apt reading of the various modalities of queer embraces the conflicting perspectives about how queer may function within African contexts. In Gqola's case, queer works in opposition to normative sexual practices that, generally speaking, abide to heterosexual intimacy and anatomically designated, binary gender identities. For others, queer represents political dialogue and confrontation. Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas introduce the edited collection *Queer African Reader*, a compilation of academic and scholarly articles, political tracts, poems, short stories, and drawings, by defining queer as revolutionary and radical politics.<sup>143</sup> Quoting at length:

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<sup>141</sup> Bates, Robert H., et al. “Introduction.” *Africa and the Disciplines: The Contributions of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities*, edited by Robert H. Bates, et al., University of Chicago Press, 1993, pp. xx.

<sup>142</sup> Gqola, Pumla Dineo. "Introduction." *Queer Africa: New and Collected Fiction*, edited by Karen Martin and Makhosazana Xaba. Modjaji Books, 2013, pp. 1.

<sup>143</sup> Ekine and Abbas articulate their perspective on the purpose and hopeful outcome of the collection:

Understanding the magnitude of what we were proposing to document in the *Queer African Reader*, we knew that we could not attempt to do this alone. So, we took to the wires to elicit discussion from our multiple communities and prospective contributors on how to document not only the resistance in the daily lives and struggles of Africa's queer communities but to valorise the complexity of how queer liberation is framed in Africa and by Africans. We also hoped that the collectivizing of the reader would ensure that the publication was responsive



We use the term 'queer' here and in the title to denote a political frame *rather than* a gender or sexual behaviour. We use queer to underscore a perspective that embraces gender and sexual plurality and seeks to transform, overhaul and revolutionise African order rather than seek to assimilate into oppressive hetero-patriarchal-capitalist frameworks. Queer is our dissident stance, but we use it here knowing the limitations of the terminology in relation to our African neocolonial realities. (*italics added*)<sup>144</sup>

In a separate article, Ekine expands queer into dialogues with "LGBT imperialism and homophobic religious fundamentalism on the one hand and indigenous contemporary constructions of sexuality and gender on the other."<sup>145</sup> In the same collection, Lyn Ossome positions queer in congruence with class-based battles: "Queer people are targeted not so much because of their identity, as to deliberately continue the ideological conscription of subjects, subvert the reality of shared struggles, and sustain the class oppression of the majority."<sup>146</sup> These varying perspectives represent the beginnings of Queer African Studies and its intellectual, political, socio-cultural and linguistic potential. These discussions do not assert a singular, universal notion of queer. Rather, like earlier arguments concerning the political, social, and sexual productivity of queer in the global North during the late 1980s/early 1990s, all of which

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to the needs of the queer African movement in the discussions encompassed rather than being a voyeuristic insight for 'other' eyes. (3)

This is perhaps the greatest example of how "other eyes" may manipulate African responses to queerness. Ekine and Abbas emphasize the importance and maintenance of collectivity and community. Publishing a text like the *Queer African Reader* opens doors for appropriation by LGBTQ Western activists as for support what Massad calls the Gay International.

<sup>144</sup> Ekine, Sokari and Hakima Abbas. "Introduction." *Queer African Reader*, edited by Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas, Pambazuka Press, 2013, pp. 3.

<sup>145</sup> Ekine, Sokai. "Contesting Narratives of Queer Africa." *Queer African Reader*, edited by Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas, Pambazuka Press, 2013, pp. 78.

<sup>146</sup> Ossome, Lyn. "Postcolonial Discourses of Queer Activism and Class." *Queer African Reader*, edited by Sokari Ekine and Hakima Abbas, Pambazuka Press, 2013, pp. 37.

led originator of "queer theory," Teresa de Lauretis, to dispel "queer theory" of any of its radical potentialities soon after its birth, Queer African Studies privileges African voices in an attempt to displace and dismantle white-dominated structures embedded within African and queer studies.<sup>147</sup> To this end, "queer" is reminiscent of "Africa," an invention, an imagined entity. Queer must be made clear, a material reality, tactile and alive.

Africans across the continent and throughout the diaspora have begun to use the word "queer" as a form of gender and/or sexual identification. Other Western terms have been appropriated and have become a part, to varying degrees, of African lexicons. "Queer," though, not only represents personal identification; it is laden with the baggage of Western critical theory and specific socio-political connotations. This is not to suggest that a combination of "queer" and "African" cannot exist or that when paired it is a failed marriage. African activists have begun the process of establishing localized forms of queer. Not completely distinct from Western articulations, African concepts of queer stress political projects against forms of colonialism and neocolonialism and histories of imperialism. These acts come with a hefty price that extends beyond the theoretical and into the legislative and juridical. Is it possible to think of queer Africa without automatically reverting to viewing Africa as a deviation of Western sexual practices? Will sexualities in Africa always succumb to a secondary or tertiary status, whereby it requires filtering through Western knowledge? Is being queer in Africa the same as being queer in the West?

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<sup>147</sup> See Theresa de Lauretis' "Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities" and Annamarie Jagose's "Queer Theory."

Queer refuses identitarian stability across temporal and spatial boundaries.<sup>148</sup> To this end, to label historical sexualities across the continent that deviate from contemporary concepts of "normal" heterosexuality is to presume cultural consistency, as if heterosexuality always enforced itself through various forms of punishment or social strictures across all cultures. Contemporary reconstructions of sexualities across Africa dismantle heterosexist ideologies by reinforcing varying gender and sexual identities. Ugandan lawyer and scholar Sylvia Tamale addresses these concerns: "...it is extremely important to note that the context and experiences of such relationships did not mirror homosexual relations as understood in the West, nor were they necessarily consistent with what we may today describe as a gay or queer identity."<sup>149</sup> Social formations of sexual and gender identities may appear queer within a contemporary African context – or even in a Western context – yet were not perceived as such at the time. Even contemporary forms of polygamy, while queer within a Western context, are normative within certain African contexts.

The emergence of queer African representations may require, as Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi writes, "apposite theoretical frameworks." He argues: "The insistent inquiries into the applicability of North American queer theorizations for African experience extend insights from the earliest studies, in which respective authors stipulate that Africanists would have to formulate appropriate conceptual frameworks as queer representations emerge."<sup>150</sup> What this new framework entails is up for debate. At this moment, Queer African Studies provides potential

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<sup>148</sup> For a theoretical exploration of queer time and space, see J. Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place*.

<sup>149</sup> Tamale, "Confronting," pp. 35. See also Kendall K. Limakatso's "Women in Lesotho and the (Western) Construction of Homophobia" in Saskia Wieringa and Evelyn Blackwood's *Female Desires: Same-Sex Relations and Transgender Practices Across Cultures*.

<sup>150</sup> Osinubi, Taiwo Adetunji. "Queer Prolepsis and the Sexual Commons: An Introduction." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 47, no. 2, Summer 2016, pp. xii.

intellectual conduits for scholars to design methodologies and research techniques geared towards queer African perspectives and representations. Its neophyte stature lends to its instabilities and common thematic: fears over what Joseph Massad calls the "Gay International" guide worries over the usage of queer as an appropriate identity marker.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, anxieties about global processes of identity formation underscore the powerful influence of human rights and Western academic discourses. Furthermore, Queer African Studies stems from several discourses: queer theory/queer studies; African studies; anthropology and ethnography; history; and literary and cinematic studies, amongst others.

Concern over the direction of Queer African Studies, and, particularly, who is directing it, cannot be overstated. The formation of Queer African Studies combines two distinct discourses: queer theory/studies and African Studies. This ambitious venture operates under guiding premises that both discourses function, historically, under Eurocentric modes of knowledge and are largely determined by white scholars. Generally speaking, white academics have dominated both fields, determining discursive purposes and philosophical dispositions. African Studies suffers from a history of white-domination. Deborah Amory pointedly argues, "Put in the crudest terms, white people did African studies, while black people did Afro-Am."<sup>152</sup> Ashley Currier and Therese Migraïne-George, two dominant voices in the theoretical formulation of Queer African Studies, agree with Amory's assessment, noting that "white supremacy haunt[s] African studies."<sup>153</sup> White dominance, too, infiltrates Queer Theory/Studies. As noted in the Introduction, scholars within queer theory integrated race and sexuality through

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<sup>151</sup> See Joseph Massad's "Re-Orienting Desire: The Gay International and the Arab World." *Public Culture*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2002, pp. 361-385.

<sup>152</sup> Amory, Deborah. "African Studies as American Institution." *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science*, edited by Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, University of California Press, 1997, pp. 102.

<sup>153</sup> Currier, 284.

the advent of black queer studies and queer of color critique. African voices have not found a home within these formations. "It is not enough to make space to add African examples in black queer studies or queer of color critiques," argue Currier and Migraine-George, "just as it is insufficient to suppose that adding South Asian or Middle Eastern examples will enrich such critiques."<sup>154</sup> Queer African Studies, then, is an attempt to counteract and reform staid conceptualizations of both discourses with the hope of "representing queer African subjects without subjecting them to the panoptic control of an ethnocentric gaze."<sup>155</sup> Nevertheless, this remains a significant challenge due to privileged academics from the Global North who constantly dominate the conversation.

Who gets to speak is not the only concern for Queer African Studies. "Queer" is an unstable term and has not found full acceptance amongst African scholars. Keguro Macaharia's sharp critique of queer theory relates his fears that he may become a "native informant" for well-intentioned Western scholars.<sup>156</sup> Where are the African scholars, asks Macharia. Have they been forgotten so that "queer African studies becomes simply another trick in the queer backroom"? African voices become mere tools for European and American researchers whereby

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<sup>154</sup> Currier, Ashley and Thérèse Migraine-George. "Queer Studies/African Studies: An (Im)possible Transaction?" *GLQ*, vol. 22, no. 2, April 2016, pp. 286.

<sup>155</sup> Personal observations, albeit anecdotal, might be pertinent for this case. During the fall of 2016, I had the opportunity to attend a small, twenty-person conference at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada entitled "New Directions in Queer African Studies." Scholars from Canada, the United States, South Africa, Senegal, and England, attended. It was a truly remarkable collection of scholars, all of whom have contributed to the foundation of Queer African Studies. I was grateful to hear from and speak with scholars who influenced this project. Around two months later, I attended the annual African Studies Association meeting in Washington, D.C. Founded in 2015, the "Queer African Studies Association" offered several sponsored panels. Compared to the make-up of the smaller conference, the vast majority of speakers and audience members were from institutions based within the global North.

<sup>156</sup> Macharia, Keguro. "On Being Area-Studied: A Litany of Complaint." *GLQ*, vol. 22, no. 2, April 2016, pp. 184.

their "experiences will be absorbed as 'data' or 'evidence,' not as modes of theory or as challenges to the conceptual assumptions that drive queer studies."<sup>157</sup> For Macharia it is not that Africans have appropriated queer as a form of identification; it is the potential for academic interests in queer African identities to replay imperial-era academic research whereby African bodies will be studied and interpreted through Western lenses.

Influence does not presume African activists lack agency. Activists speak of themselves as LGBTQ, as *kuchu*, as *ladys* and *gents* and so forth. They create and forge their own communities, communities inextricably linked with others locally, nationally, continentally, and globally. These novels, short stories, and films distribute pertinent knowledge about local issues of state-sponsored oppression, familial obligations to heterosexual reproduction, socially dictated mores concerning masculinity and femininity, with the intention not of pinkwashing, but of creating communities of resistance. With respect to Macharia, this project focuses strictly on African voices and privileges socio-cultural contextualization over theoretical applications. My approach to the chosen works is not to view the authors or directors as "native informants" but as carriers of queer African memory engaged with histories disremembered over decades of colonial rule and post-colonial governmental demonization. Tension between "transnational and cross-disciplinary transactions" might offer the most fruitful outcomes. Through their reworking, they may offer "the most unruly and dissident outcomes."<sup>158</sup> I find it impossible not to be aware of colonial epistemes when speaking of queer African bodies, or even suggesting the term "queer Africa." By privileging African voices, I aim not to insert African identities into a Western paradigm or search for African identities that can be read as "queer." Rather, the goal is to

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<sup>157</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 185.

<sup>158</sup> Currier and Migraine-George, pp. 298.

contextually understand how different forms of queerness have been re-membered and function as counternarratives to predominant nationalistic formations of the "African" identity.

I view this as the best methodology for scholars, activists and artists from the continent, across the diaspora and over the globe: to celebrate queer histories, strategies and identities and fight against the diminishment of African voices. And it may, as Lyn Ossome argues, represent "conservative strands of thinking" where the recognition of LGBTQ rights "ties freedom of choice to issues of accessibility" which "implicitly speaks to social and economic rights as the emergent frontier of struggle for LGBTI groups."<sup>159</sup> It is necessary though for queer activists to locate sexual rights within social and economic rights since they remain some of the most evident examples of oppression. Further, battles for queer rights are battles for women's rights, the rights of the working class and poor, the eradication of corrupt politicians and heads of state, and health care initiatives such as HIV/AIDS prevention. In this respect, pejoratively labeling issues of social and economic rights conservative discredit daily processes of living within states supportive of anti-homosexuality laws and punishments.

Some of these issues come to light in the chosen novels, short stories and films, but a significant portion of these works function under one axiom: that homosexuality has always existed in Africa. This chapter details recent debates about homosexuality in Africa to contextualize the following chapters. Arguments about queer Africa are on a precipice: either the debate will take on a new form, or it will continue to rehash points previously made. At this point, there is a stalemate with neither side conceding defeat. Both sides look to same arguments over and over again, telegraphing the other side's responses. This project demonstrates the

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<sup>159</sup> Ossome, Lyn. "Postcolonial Discourses of Queer Activism and Class." *Queer African Reader*, edited by Sokari Ekiné and Hakima Abbas, Pambazuka Press, 2013, pp. 37.

inherent power of literature and cinema to open new avenues for discussion about sexualities and genders and rethink current manifestations of what Africa means.



CHAPTER TWO: "Unorthodox Conduct": Sexuality in Yulisa Amadu Maddy's *No Past, No Present, No Future*

In 1997, the University of Western Ontario opened the Pride Library, an archive, social space, and resource center for LGBTQ scholarship and student organizations. Thanks in part to generous donations by the London, Ontario organization Homophile Association of London Ontario (HALO), the Library hosts one of Canada's largest collections of LGBTQ writings and materials.<sup>160</sup> It also houses a significant amount of literature, media, periodicals, and zines.<sup>161</sup> A stained glass window, created by London, Ontario artist Lynette Richards, greets patrons at the Library's entrance and commemorates HALO as an integral piece for the Pride Library's establishment. Dr. James Miller, the Pride Library's founder and director, explains the impetus behind the piece: "I decided that it would make a lot of sense to have a commemorative window or some commemorative art object to celebrate the great achievements of HALO in the early years following the liberation movement in the 70s. There are also a whole series of names inscribed on the glass whose books can be read in the Pride Library. I felt it was important for anyone coming into the Pride Library to be connected to the great cultural achievements of gay and lesbian people, and trans folk and bisexuals through the centuries."<sup>162</sup> The window features, in addition to the HALO logo and the Pride flag imagined as a stack of books, a list of 135 authors, including William Shakespeare, Samuel R. Delany and Virginia Woolf, whose writings have influenced and continue to influence LGBTQ communities. Miller reached as far back

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<sup>160</sup> The Library includes, in addition to its regular collection, special collections such as the "Homophobic Classics Collection," "Trans Collection" and "Queer Graphica Collection."

<sup>161</sup> See Danielle Cooper's "'Big Gay Library:' An Ethnography of the Pride Library at the University of Western Ontario" for an extensive history of the library.

<sup>162</sup> "The Pride Library at the University of Western Ontario, London Ontario." *YouTube*, uploaded by adminreview, 22 March 2011, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUhe0DvLSWM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUhe0DvLSWM).

Dante, the library's "honorary straight," for his "sympathetic treatment of the sodomites" in his fourteenth-century epic *Inferno*.<sup>163</sup>

One name occupies the last row: Sierra Leonean author and playwright Yulisa Amadu Maddy (1936-2014). It is a rather curious honorific considering several African authors across the continent have written, in some capacity, sympathetic representations of queer African communities and individuals. For example, Wole Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters* (1963) and South African/Botswanan Bessie Head's novel *A Question of Power* (1973) complicate representations of homosexuality. Egyptian author Naguib Mahfouz's novel *Midaq Alley* (1947) was the first modern Arabic novel to include a homosexual character. These writers are not included nor are any other contemporary African literary authors.<sup>164</sup> My listing of these authors is not an attempt to diminish Maddy or his permanent placement as a supporter of LGBTQ communities. Maddy's inclusion sheds light on this little-known author whose works speak, as Maddy himself opined, for the "voiceless" of Sierra Leonean society. In his words: "I see my works as giving a voice to the voiceless because society 'dis-empowers' the voiceless. I am not trying to usher in a world revolution; I am just presenting Sierra Leone society for what it is, with all its joys, its thrills, its disappointments, its beauties, and its ugliness [...] I do not just write about fictional characters; I write about the everyday person you can recognize in your own back yard or in your own village."<sup>165</sup> His commitment to marginalized communities and

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<sup>163</sup> Miller's comments also purport knowledge of each author's sexuality. Inclusion was determined not only from writing influential texts, but also by being a member of – regardless of historical accuracy or verifiability – the LGBTQ community. I made several attempts to contact Dr. Miller but received no response.

<sup>164</sup> Hélène Cixous is the only other African-born author represented.

<sup>165</sup> Muana, Patrick. "Miscreants, Drifters, and Misfits: Dislocated Identities in Yulisa Amadu Maddy's *No Past, No Present, No Future*." *Knowledge is More Than Mere Words: A Critical Introduction to Sierra Leonean Literature*, edited by Eustace Palmer and Abioseh Michael Porter, Africa World Press, 2008, pp. 235.

individuals extended over his career as a playwright, novelist, choreographer, and academic. For an unknown author and playwright amongst Western readers, his inclusion deserves an explanation, or, at the very least, a closer look into his available works.

Maddy published under several different names over his career: Pat Amadu Maddy, Pat Abisodou Maddy and, from the 1970s onward, Yulisa Amadu Maddy.<sup>166</sup> He was born in 1936 in Freetown, Sierra Leone. His father was a sailor and his mother "has been everything: a trader, washerwoman, everything."<sup>167</sup> His grandfather was a witch doctor and storyteller, and, as per his mother's observations, many of Maddy's emotional attributes – his temper and attitude – mirror those of his grandfather. In 1958, he emigrated to England to attend university where he studied literature and drama.<sup>168</sup> The English literary canon – consisting of "Shakespeare and Molière and all these European writers"<sup>169</sup> – left him searching for black authors and dramatists. His quest led him to discover the works of Wole Soyinka, Aimé Césaire, and James Baldwin. They became his creative muses during the composition of his first play, *Yon Kon*. He based the play on a real pickpocket in Sierra Leone. The play centers on the final days of an imprisoned thief's jail

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<sup>166</sup> Dunton, Chris. "Staging Rebellion: The Plays of Yulisa Amadu Maddy." *TESBO: Journal of Research*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2011, pp. 30.

<sup>167</sup> Maddy, Yulisa Amadu. Interview with Lee Nichols. *Voice of America*. 2 July 1975. For a complete transcription of the interview, see Nichols' *Conversations with African Writers*. All further citations from the radio interview are from the written transcript. Nichols was also the African Division Special Projects Officer for the *Voice of America*. The *Voice of America* began in 1942 and was designed to distribute anti-Nazi propaganda and counteract Nazi ideologies. See Alan L. Heil Jr.'s *Voice of America: A History*.

<sup>168</sup> See Simon Gikandi's entry on Maddy in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of African Literature* for more details on Maddy's travels that included France and Denmark, with France being a brief setting in *No Past*. In his obituary about Maddy, Eustace Palmer claims that Maddy never attended university. However, in his interview with Lee Nichols, Maddy specifically mentions his attending university and how he became "fed up with formal education." Furthermore, an entry for the website Encyclopedia.com ("Maddy, Yulisa Amadu 1936-") notes Maddy's education at the City of London University in 1965 where he earned a postgraduate degree in arts administration.

<sup>169</sup> Nichols, pp. 108.

sentence. Jail became his home over the years, and, once leaving prison, he steals a chicken for the sole purpose of being re-imprisoned. According to Maddy, *Yon Kon*'s origins stem from bet with an Englishman who proclaimed that Maddy lacked writing skills. He took the Englishman's bet and, after imbibing a good deal of whiskey, wrote the short piece. Maddy then submitted the play to the BBC's radio programming and two weeks later he received a letter of its acceptance along with £25.

From his beginnings with *Yon Kon*, Maddy dedicated his life's work to the economic and social development of the common people of Sierra Leone. Yet he always perceived himself as an outsider. And he relished in his social deviancy and conscious refusal to abide by social norms. In his interview with Lee Nichols, host of the half-hour long radio segment "Conversations with African Writers" for the *Voice of America*, the United States government-funded international broadcast station, Maddy reflects on his views of upper-class Leonean society and how he distances himself from societal expectations. The following quote also pertains to Maddy's perspectives on relationships and his preferred companions:

They think that I am belligerent. I do not easily, sort of, conform to the sort of norms that they go about with, you know, whether in writing or in normal everyday life. I could go around with a boy in the fifth form [between fourteen and fifteen years old] or in the second form [between twelve and thirteen years old] and I'd sing in the street and dance in the street. Well, I mean, for a man of my caliber whose been an international figure as a writer, as an actor, as a theatre and film director, they wouldn't accept that. I should be drinking champagne and whiskey with them and select some society woman as a girlfriend. No, I like the

common folk.<sup>170</sup>

It is an odd exchange, an exchange Nichols comments on later on in the interview. Maddy's ambiguous phrases – his interactions with boys of varying ages, their being preferable over “society women” – leads to questions about his sexuality. The phrase “go around” may suggest an intimate relationship or friendship with younger boys, but it is not clear whether it is sexual in nature. Yet he comments on his social obligations as dictated by upper-class men and women and the necessity for “some society woman as a girlfriend.” Furthermore, his “international” status do not charm Maddy away from his personal affiliations with “the common folk.” With a “belligerent” attitude stemming from his disregard towards “the sort of norms that they go about with,” Maddy refuses bourgeois perceptions of a writer’s proper social affiliations.

Nichols' introductory remarks, too, signal Maddy’s unconventional personality. To use Nichols' phrase, Maddy is “of a somewhat different stamp.” He continues: “An actor, playwright, and novelist who sometimes startles his countrymen by his unorthodox conduct such as singing and dancing in the street as he himself puts it. A creative artist who confesses to feeling ill at ease in his own Sierra Leone society yet who wants passionately to declare what his society stands for and what he feels it can become.”<sup>171</sup> Indeed, Maddy's “feeling ill at ease” translated into his works, many of which call attention to the abilities of outsiders to alter society for the better.

Only five of Maddy's thirteen performed plays have been widely published: *Alla Gbah*, *Yon Kon*, *Obasai*, and *Ghana Bendu* were published under Heinemann's African Writers Series in *Obasai and Other Plays* (1968) while *Life Everlasting*, also published by Heinemann, was included in the collection *Short African Plays* (1972). All of Maddy's works memorialize Sierra

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<sup>170</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 107.

<sup>171</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 107.

Leone's working class and poor communities. This has led to comparisons with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, to which Dunton writes, "few other African playwrights have dramatized so consistently and vividly the desire to rebel against the codes and restrictions of contemporary society."<sup>172</sup> None of these plays address homosexuality in detail thereby negating their pertinence in regards to Maddy's inclusion in the Pride Library. His play *Big Berrin*, arguably his most controversial play due to its direct criticism of the Siaka Stevens regime that led to his nine-month imprisonment, and is unavailable for purchase, includes the line "Homosexuality? Wheyting be dat?," a line Chris Dunton used for his foundational work on the treatment of homosexuality in African literatures. Originally written in Krio and the later translated by Maddy into English, *Big Berrin* reflects 1970s youthful disillusionment towards postcolonial governments. As Chris Dunton notes, "If rebellion is carried out here by the young," writes Dunton, "this is so because they are the ones whose lives are threatened – foreshortened – by the corruption of earlier generations."<sup>173</sup> The grandmother, a member of the older generation and of a conservative mindset, speaks the line above. She offhandedly questions the existence of homosexuality and its affiliation with other sexual issues that plague the land. She reminisces about her youth and the inability of today's society due to the younger generation's failure to abide by traditional social norms.<sup>174</sup> Teme, a young revolutionary discouraged by neocolonialism, affirms her fears of sexual deviancy. Western aid has fomented the growth of homosexuality: "But today those are all parts of the program packaged UNDER-DEVELOPED

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<sup>172</sup> Dunton. "Staging Rebellion," pp. 20

<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 30.

<sup>174</sup> The grandmother's lines read as follows: "In my youth, girls were proud to be...virgins. Boys and girls stayed innocent until the time was right. Mothers did not take lovers indiscriminately. Fathers did not go out to fornicate and contract disease. Rape was uncommon in this our land. Incest unheard of in this community. Homosexuality? Wheyting be dat? Lesbianism! Goodness Gracious [*sic*] no! For where? Unisex! What in God's name is that kind of depravity?" (15-16).

AID PROGRAMS. Take it and you have a chance to survive; refuse it, you perish..."<sup>175</sup> Teme's words mirror recent critiques of Western aid and its affiliations with LGBTQ rights. Besides these few lines, the play does not delve further into homosexuality.<sup>176</sup>

Maddy's sole novel *No Past, No Present, No Future* (hereafter *No Past*) provides the best opportunity to understand his affiliation with pro-LGBTQ literature.<sup>177</sup> Published in 1973, the novel revolves around Joe Bengoh and his two friends, Ade John and Santigie Bombalai, known together as the Brothers Three. Joe's sexual experiences – mostly positive with men while resoundingly negative with women – during his formative years in the country of Bauya, a surrogate for Maddy's Sierra Leone, result in his tentative acceptance of his homosexuality. His initial apprehension about his sexual feelings leads him to indulge in alcohol, stealing, and frivolous spending. His self-destructive behavior escalates after he, Ade, and Santigie immigrate to London to continue their education. While in London, he faces verbal and physical abuse – homophobic and racial – which fuels his bouts of self-deprecation. Ade and Santigie, exemplars of hypermasculinity, ridicule Joe with homophobic slurs and contribute to Joe's mental breakdown.<sup>178</sup> Ade castigates Joe's sexuality and repeatedly taunts him with homophobic phrases. Santigie does not intervene; rather, he allows for Ade's abusive remarks and protects him from Joe's physical retaliation. This continued abuse – both societal and self-perpetuated

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<sup>175</sup> Maddy, Yulisa Amadu. *Big Berrin*. Self-published, 1984: pp. 16.

<sup>176</sup> Michael Etherton's analysis is the only lengthy piece of scholarship on *Big Berrin*. See Etherton's *The Development of African Drama*.

<sup>177</sup> Maddy apparently finished a second novel titled *Beasts, Bastards and Burdens*. For reasons unknown, the novel remains unpublished.

<sup>178</sup> I find Dennis E. Reidy, et al.'s, definition of hypermasculinity appropriate in this case. He writes, hypermasculinity is "an extreme form of adherence to the masculine gender role and encompasses calloused sexual attitudes toward women and beliefs that danger is exciting and violence is manly. [...] Acts such as sexual assault and physical aggression can be seen as being intended to maintain dominance and express adherence to masculine gender norms." See Reidy, et al.'s "Men Who Aggress Against Women: Effects of Feminine Gender Role Violation on Physical Aggression in Hypermasculine Men."

through excessive alcohol consumption – deteriorates his academic standings. Mentally undone by his friend's abuse, continued academic failures, and mounting financial debt, Joe attempts to commit suicide. Michael, his white, English boyfriend, discovers Joe and sends him to a hospital where he fully recovers. Renewed by Michael's selfless act, Joe adopts a positive humanist perspective and distances himself from Santigie and Ade. At novel's end, Joe is the only one of the three in a loving, stable relationship whereas Santigie and Ade struggle with their failed heterosexual relationships.

This summarization does not delve into Maddy's incorporation of stereotypes and myths about homosexuality in Africa. Some stereotypes include the association of homosexuality with femininity and mental disorders; the perpetuation of homosexuality as a European importation; homosexuality as spread through sexual indoctrination; and homosexuality as misogynistic. Maddy invokes these stereotypes during Joe's sexual development to varying degrees, the vast majority of which occurs in the first section of the novel. For example, Joe's relationship with Father O'Don, a white English missionary, suggests that homosexuality is a European importation acquired through sexual contact. Additionally, Joe's negative sexual experiences with women, first and foremost with Mary, a young woman whom he, as well as Ade, has sexual intercourse, exasperates any and all potential romantic heterosexual relationships. Joe's homosexuality is not something inborn; rather, it is manufactured through outside interactions. Upon his arrival in England, however, Joe sheds the stereotypical veneer of homosexuality as he envisions an Africa capable of multiple sexualities and genders. He discredits European conceptualizations of Africa as an inherently heterosexual continent. These later representations of homosexuality undo earlier stereotypical representations, in effect showcasing Joe's sense of



maturation through his acceptance of his sexuality and his unrelenting refusal to allow for the perpetuation of European falsehoods.

*No Past* is a complicated novel, a work that is not easily summarized or framed as singularly pro- or anti-homosexuality. To elide a presentist reading, I address the novel's internal contradictions, explicitly Maddy's critique hypermasculinity and misogyny through a homosexual character that, at times, exhibits misogynistic tendencies. The first half of the chapter explores Maddy's background and his perspectives on himself as an artist. The second half focuses on *No Past*, Joe Bengoh's sexual development, the relationship between homosexuality and masculinity, and Ade and Santigie's hypermasculine tendencies. Lastly, this chapter addresses Joe's open antagonism and vilification of women. Joe's unique status as homosexual and moral compass, however, underlines his importance as an early pro-LGBTQ figure within African literatures. Undoing tropes of hypermasculine African bodies and European epistemologies of African sexuality, Joe denies his erasure. He remakes himself through his homosexual relationships in the face of racist oppression and socio-cultural pressure. Maddy's "unorthodox conduct" pervades *No Past* for he embellishes youthful anti-social behavior. *No Past* details the potential downfall of future generations as exemplified through upcoming *élites* such as Ade or emotionally isolated Santigie. Outsiders such as Joe embellish and embrace their own "unorthodox conduct" as they propose alternative methods of existence in an attempt to revise accepted socio-cultural norms.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> *No Past* also connects autobiographical information through Joe. In his memorial to Maddy, Eustace Palmer notes Maddy's travels during his youth. At the age of twenty-two, Maddy traveled from France to Britain, where attended the Rose Bruford College of Speech and Drama. And, according to the back cover content of *No Past* as well as his interview with Nichols, Maddy worked for a time in Denmark where he lectured on African literature. His travels mirror Joe's, especially considering neither Ade nor Santigie visit France prior to their emigration to England. Joe, too, attends a school dedicated to dramatic arts; however, the school is never

Maddy's dissatisfaction with bourgeoisie society emerges through his working class and poor characters. As noted earlier with *Yon Kon*, the prisoner's inability to live outside prison reveals the failures of the Sierra Leonean government to help its citizens prosper. *Big Berrin*, too, revolves around a poor and working class community and its political, financial, and social struggles. In *No Past*, Maddy denounces the exploitation poor and working class individuals, many of whom originate from outside Freetown, by social *élites*. Called "C.B's," an acronym for "country body," people of the poor and working class excoriate *élites* for systematically exploiting their labor by transforming them into glorified indentured servants. Joe, a C.B himself, refuses to beg at the feet of *élites* after his parents die in an alcohol-induced fire. He tries to disassociate himself from his poor, working class community due to their lack of education. Nevertheless, his occasional slippages into the local vernacular reaffirm his working class background. Joe prides himself on his years of school and envisions a future driven by his educational prowess, yet he also does not want to become associated with *élites*, placing him in-between worlds and communities, an outsider who refuses to align with either side.

Ade John, a Krio, adopts Joe's displeasure towards authoritative adults and his *élite* parents.<sup>180</sup> His displeasure towards his upper-class affiliations comes in vigorous denouncements

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named. Considering Maddy's sympathetic portrayal of homosexuality, it may be possible that Maddy's representation reflects some of his own experiences or, perhaps, experiences of others he met during his time in France and/or Britain. Yet his tendency to embellish stereotypes may reflect his personal lack of knowledge about homosexuality.

<sup>180</sup> Zimitri Erasmus provides an historical account of the development of Krio/Creoles within Sierra Leone, specifically Freetown: "Some Freetown settlers, particularly Christianized and educated former slaves, had been transported as slaves from Africa to the New World before they voluntarily settled in Freetown. Others were descendants of former slaves. Early settlers, the elite of Freetown's Krio community, had some choice, severely circumscribed in the aftermath of slavery, about settling or 'returning' to Freetown. In contrast, Liberated Africans, the majority of the its population in the 1800s, were captured in transit to the New World (as slaves) from Africa and forcibly settled in Freetown as 'free' persons under the auspices of the British anti-slavery movement. Captives and their descendants constituted the lower stratum of the Krio community.

of his supplicant father. A mid-level official in the postal service, Ade's father crumbles at the sight of his much younger European boss in the hope of earning more prestigious employment. Ade calls his father a "black European," a variation on the more common pejorative "black Englishman."<sup>181</sup> Although he views his father negatively, Ade pities him and opines for the day when no black man must grovel at a white person's feet. Ade's role as a "generational rebel"<sup>182</sup> deteriorates as his self-serving nature emerges. He exploits women for sexual and financial gain, develops schemes while working on the railway designed to pilfer from commuters and business people alike, and treats Santigie and Joe as underlings. After he immigrates to London, he

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Settlers, Liberated Africans and their descendants, considered 'westernized', were 'Creole' in colonial parlance....With time, elites and upwardly mobile Liberated Africans self-identified as 'Creole' in defence of their intermediate social status." See Zimitri Erasmus' "Creolization, colonial citizenship(s) and degeneracy: A critique of selected histories of Sierra Leone and South Africa."

<sup>181</sup> The term is not without controversy. Gibril R. Cole questions the historical viability of the term "Black Englishmen" as it presumes Creole/Krio socio-economic dominance, an inherently Christian faith, and isolationist perspective. The term has been attributed to the collective works of Christopher Fyfe, a British government archivist at the time of Sierra Leone's independence and author of *A History of Sierra Leone* (1962), Arthur Porter, and, especially, Akintola Wyse, "who argued for the use of the nomenclature *Krio*, instead of *Creole*, in reference to the descendants of the former slaves and captives." Wyse, in particular, "worked laboriously to establish their [Krio] credentials as a distinct 'ethnic group.'" These early scholars, Cole argues, are the progenitors of the "Krio myth" promoted by Maddy. Cole explains why Krio is a myth and is closely affiliated with British imperialism:

These scholars...ultimately derive their intellectual cues from the British "philanthropic" sponsors, imperial proconsuls and missionaries, who narrowly envisioned the Sierra Leone settlement as a Christian- and European-oriented enterprise and loyal subjects of the British Crown. These cues produced the inelegant elitist and gender-based characterization of nineteenth-century Krio society as a colony of "Black Englishmen" steeped in Victorian English values. They have also been responsible for the production of a historiography that has concentrated largely on the Westernizing impact of the Christian evangelical missions on the manumitted Africans and their descendants, rather than highlighting the multifarious religious, ethnic, and cultural processes that molded their lives and historical experiences.

Cole identifies Muslim contributions to Krio society and reinterprets Krio society as diverse and malleable. Maddy, however, represents Creole "*élites*" in accordance with Wyse, et al., although the publication of *No Past* precedes their works. See Gibril R. Cole's *The Krio of West Africa*.

<sup>182</sup> Muana, pp. 240.

becomes engaged to Bodil, a white Danish woman, for the sole purpose of weaseling into her father's business connections with the hopes of greater financial wealth. His exploits exemplify *élite* ideals of using others for personal benefit, ideals Maddy finds reprehensible.

In his review of *No Past* during its initial publication, Leonean literary scholar Eustace Palmer disagreed with Maddy's vitriolic representation of Krio society as he found Maddy's "basic assumptions and characteristic of Creole [*sic*] society" overbearing and ineffective.<sup>183</sup> Patrick Muana describes Palmer as "berat[ing]" Maddy for his "oversimplification of Creole society" but ultimately concludes that such concerns are "not crucial to a thoroughgoing reading of the novel."<sup>184</sup> I agree, in part, since Maddy relegates Ade into an almost secondary character over the course of the novel. Divisions fade between *élites* and C.B.'s as the novel shifts from Bauya to London; issues of sexuality and gender take precedence over class which lessens the impact of Palmer's critique. When Ade does appear, his primary purpose is to degrade Joe's character and spew homophobic rhetoric. Ade's *élite* background affords him the ability to speak and act without the fear of retribution. Nevertheless, as noted previously, Maddy's initial descriptions of class differences within the first section of the novel make way for racial, sexual, and gender issues in the novel's latter sections.

Palmer's criticism extends beyond Maddy's representation of Krio/Creole society. For example, he derides Maddy's "amateurish" writing and "linguistic incompetence."<sup>185</sup> Palmer's criticism here is not without merit. Maddy's playwriting skills are evident in the novel's structuring: each chapter operates as if it is a different scene within a larger three-part play. Yet, for a playwright, the dialogue feels stilted; characters speak of racial discrimination except that

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<sup>183</sup> Palmer, Eustace. "Yulisa Amadu Maddy: *No Past, No Present, No Future*." *African Literature Today*, vol. 7, 1975, pp. 164.

<sup>184</sup> Muana, pp. 240.

<sup>185</sup> Palmer, "*No Past*," pp. 164-165.

Maddy never actually explores racial dynamics in detail; and he does not develop clear character progressions. While Palmer does not explore these issues in greater detail, he does ridicule Joe Bengoh. Bengoh, Palmer writes, experiments with "loose living, samples all sorts of perversions in Paris and eventually becomes a hippie-type drug addict and homosexual in England."<sup>186</sup> Maddy's positive representation of homosexuality is a red flag, argues Palmer, symbolic of Maddy's "uncritical" perspective.<sup>187</sup>

Only upon Maddy's death in 2014 did Palmer reorient *No Past's* importance within African literatures. This was primarily due to Maddy's positive representation of homosexuality. He writes, "[t]his work is also significant because it was one of the first African novels to handle the topic of male homosexuality, a topic that was then taboo not only in literary works but in society as a whole."<sup>188</sup> Other scholars have addressed Maddy's representation of male homosexuality. Chris Dunton, for example, comments on Maddy's usage of stereotypes as a "less than credible account of sexual psychology."<sup>189</sup> Marc Epprecht affirms Dunton's assessment as he draws attention to several words – for example, "battyman" and "Afro-queer" – as sources of homophobic negativity. Epprecht concedes, however, that Maddy's "sympathetic portrayals" of homosexuality "criticize[s] Western intellectuals who project an image of heterosexual purity onto Africans."<sup>190</sup> Patrick Muana suggests that Maddy's depictions of homosexuality create a

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<sup>186</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 165.

<sup>187</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 165. An anonymous reviewer for the *New Internationalist* viewed Joe's "gayness...as mere political point-scoring because Maddy writes about it so unconvincingly." The reviewer, writing on the 1996 republication, either purposefully ignores or is simply unaware of *No Past's* initial publication date and the dynamic history of homosexuality in Africa.

<sup>188</sup> Palmer, "An Appreciation," pp. 2.

<sup>189</sup> Dunton, Chris. "'Wheyting be dat?': The Treatment of Homosexuality in African Literature." *Research in African Literatures* vol. 20, no. 3, Autumn 1989, pp. 430.

<sup>190</sup> Epprecht, *Heterosexual Africa?*, pp. 140-1.

"moral conundrum."<sup>191</sup> He identifies the issue as follows: on the one hand, "Joe's homosexuality is shown as an outcome of growth," while on the other hand, he contests that "Maddy does not deal with homosexuality purely in terms of sexual morality, but also in terms of establishing the predatory nature of the white presence, and in raising questions about masculinity."<sup>192</sup> Muana does not further explicate on the exact constitution of this "moral conundrum." Chantal Zabus offers an intertextual interpretation whereby she views *No Past* as a *bildungsroman* comparable to Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.<sup>193</sup> She frames Joe as analogous to Dorian Gray,

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<sup>191</sup> Muana, pp. 248.

<sup>192</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 249.

<sup>193</sup> Calling *No Past* a *bildungsroman* poses generic difficulties. *Bildungsroman*, a novel of personal development, cultivation, and refinement, is a European narrative format developed by European critics. "Perhaps the only point of consensus in considering whether any narrative can be considered a *bildungsroman*," write Ralph A. Austen, "is that it should deal with an individual's life, focusing on his or her formative youth in the context of a 'modernizing' world." From this definition, *No Past* resembles a classic *bildungsroman*. Austen questions whether such labels fit within African literatures. Working with Camara Laye's *L'enfant noir* (1953) and Wole Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (1981) as two exemplary narratives typically associated with the genre in African literatures, he tries to come to terms with postcolonial responses to the *Bildungsroman* and the relationship of the individualistically driven narrative with African narratives of collectivity. Unfortunately, what results is the banal conclusion that African narratives "enrich our understanding of the genre as well as Africa's place in the world." Nevertheless, Austen distinguishes and identifies four forms of "bildungsroman production":

...its "classical," optimistic, and largely German late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century form; a disillusioned early to mid-nineteenth-century French and Russian variant; an again more optimistic (thus also "classical") British version of the mid-nineteenth century; and finally the "modernist" (and largely British or German) late nineteenth- to early twentieth-century return to disillusionment. *The key distinction among these variations in the genre is whether the hero's (or heroine's) individual and youthful Bildung can result in some satisfactory adult collective life, i.e., integration into the larger social order.*<sup>193</sup> (italics added)

The final sentence presupposes the necessity for the individual's reintroduction, or, at the very least, acceptance into "the" collective social order. In *No Past*, Joe refuses to enter into a "larger social order" comprised of Santigies and Ades or a strictly European order built upon systematic racism. His experiences with homophobia coupled with English racism drives him further away from desiring social acceptance. In the end, his decision to leave with Michael, the only person who accepts and loves him, constitutes his escape from "adult collective life" and is primarily for his personal safety. He achieves a sense of pride knowing who he is. Aware and accepting of his

Basil Hallward's "*fin-de-siecle* alter-ego" and London as "a city of sexual liberation away from Victorian prudishness around the sexual mores of the upper class."<sup>194</sup> In Zabus's case, Sierra Leonean/Bauyan social norms encapsulate Victorian attitudes, especially those promoted by Krio, whom Maddy perceives as emblematic of British ideals. Only by leaving Bauya can Joe fully explore his sexuality.

These analyses of homosexuality within *No Past* lack extensive close readings of Joe's sexual development. Up to this point, only Patrick Muana has dedicated an entire article solely to *No Past*; however, he dedicates one paragraph to Joe's sexuality. Greater attention must be granted to several critical scenes: Joe's initial homosexual experiences with Father O'Don; his first heterosexual experience with a woman named Mary; his encounters with Ade and Santigie's homophobic rhetoric; and his conversations with his drama school principal and Bodil, Ade's fiancé. Each scene contributes to understanding Joe's complicated sexual development. Complicated in the sense that his perceptions about his sexuality vacillate from acceptance to repugnance and back again. This circuitous depart and return is more so the fault of Maddy's inconsistent characterization as opposed to narrative design. Rather than focus on these incongruous details, I focus on the evolution of Joe's sexuality; its early reflection of homosexual stereotypes; his relationships with women as a site of revulsion towards heterosexuality; and his acceptance and pride in his sexuality.

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sexuality, Joe acquires newfound confidence. Over several years of self-formation, he develops a deeper relationship between himself, his sexuality, and his Africanness, all which intertwine and compose his identity. While I do not necessarily disagree with Zabus's interpretation of *No Past* as a *bildungsroman*, it might be best understood as a queered *bildungsroman*. For Joe's maturation does not result in his reorientation into society. Similar to many African narratives about homosexuality, he departs from society at large for his own world, a queered world opened to his sexuality.

<sup>194</sup> Zabus, pp. 87.

Joe's foundational sexual experiences occur in Bauya with the white missionary Father O'Don and a local woman named Mary. Father O'Don "indoctrinates" Joe into homosexuality over several encounters. Although O'Don introduces Joe to homosexuality, Joe never speaks of O'Don beyond his time in Bauya except during a later argument with Ade. Whereas O'Don provides Joe's first homosexuality experience, it is Mary who concretizes Joe's aversion towards women. She haunts several of Joe's heterosexual relationships to the point that he cannot see a woman without also thinking about Mary. This poses a contradiction: his negative heterosexual relationships repulse him from participating in any future relationships with women. Yet he never speaks of his relationship with Father O'Don to anyone due to potential social ostracization. Nevertheless, Joe gradually accepts his homosexuality due to its more egalitarian qualities.

Joe's first heterosexual experience is with Mary, an orphaned C.B. woman. Only hours before their sexual episode, Mary's aunt publically humiliated Mary for her supposed sexual indiscretions. Joe, who is staying with Ade's family over the missionary school's Christmas break, watches the scene from Ade's front porch. Mary saunters down the street, naked, with buckets of human waste strung around her neck. Some observers run up to her and slap her across the face and buttocks while others stop to take "a very good look. Up and down."<sup>195</sup> Joe was familiar with Mary for she frequently walked past Ade's household: "She always looked timid and shabby in her cheap, dutty-kata', straight, rough, hand-cut dress. She gave the impression she was living in a world of her own."<sup>196</sup> Ade also watches, and he, too, has seen Mary before. He tells Joe that "[t]hat's not a very nice way to treat a human being."<sup>197</sup> Both boys

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<sup>195</sup> Maddy, Yulisa Amadu. *No Past, No Present, No Future*. Heinemann, 1973, pp. 10.

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 10.

<sup>197</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 10.



pity her for slightly different reasons: for Joe, Mary represents his childhood community whereas Ade decries her inhumane treatment. Ade's mother, an uptight, Christian *élite*, also watches the procession. Unlike Joe and Ade, she expresses her disgust towards Mary's imprudent sexuality: "That Mary is a wayward girl. A good-for-nothing, she is. She is free and cheap."<sup>198</sup> Her words cast a lasting impression on both Joe and Ade and reemerge as they eventually transform Mary into a sexualized object.

Later the same day, the two meet Mary as they wash clothes by the river. Mary, the punished and empathetic woman disappears, as Joe and Ade perceive her anew. Her "young, sexually mature, fresh and tempting" body entices Joe to wonder whether she will make love to him, for he had "never made love to a girl before."<sup>199</sup> Her body, streaked with "whip marks and clots," morphs from a site of abusive punishment into sexual temptation as her "breasts stood bold and the nipples strong, pointed, black and shiny."<sup>200</sup> Joe, emboldened by Ade's mother's words, approaches Mary, leaving Ade to watch from the side. After a short conversation, they walk into the bush. This type of pairing off is not unprecedented for, as Joe thinks, "most girls going upstream to skate and then for a walk in the bush with boys, well, they usually give in to whoever is available."<sup>201</sup> In Joe's mind, Mary's scant clothing and her walking away with him verifies Ade's mother's words: "He remembered Ade's mother had told them Mary was a free-for-all. Why not prove it?"<sup>202</sup> Before initiating sexual contact with her, he searches for her "consent."<sup>203</sup> He gives her hand a squeeze to which she responds with a tightening grasp. Taking this as "good response," he "laid his right hand on Mary's bare bosom" and "squeezed and

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<sup>198</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 11.

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 12.

<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 11.

<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 14.

<sup>202</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 14.

<sup>203</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 14.

squeezed."<sup>204</sup> With this confirmation, he is convinced of their mutual feelings for "she said nothing." He then thinks, "'Should I? Should I? Will she? Will she? [...]' This is your one and only chance Joe, she understands. She won't resist. She wants an outlet herself. She needs you as much as you need her, go on, take her, she's all for you."<sup>205</sup> The setting transforms into an Edenic escape with bountiful natural surroundings, such as "blossoming mango trees" and grandiose baobab trees, and singing birds. His internal dialogue affirms his sense of physical ownership of Mary whereby her individuality disappears and her prime role is to pleasure Joe. Mary's silence does not confirm nor deny her sexuality; however, Joe rationalizes her silence to equal consent. Furthermore, her mental state exhibits a life of constant abuse and mistrust. "No person want a girl like me," she tells Joe, "'I have nothing to give.'" Soon afterward, Mary "gave herself quietly."

Ade watches the events unfold from a distance. As Mary and Joe get dressed, Ade appears and blackmails Mary into having sex with him. What would her aunt think of her sexual indiscretions, he asks? Mary, fearful of new punishments, "succumbed quietly without a word." Joe, although he "appealed to Ade not to," allows Ade to rape Mary. The scene concludes: "Joe Bengoh left them. He walked away feeling sick. He felt cheap and dirty."<sup>206</sup> After leaving Ade with Mary, Joe "thought he would never trust Ade or any élite for as long as he lived. Women for him, that was the end. That incident left an indelible scar on his subconscious."<sup>207</sup> In submitting to Ade, Mary transforms into an object of Joe's disgust and hatred. Every subsequent woman whom Joe sleeps with – for Mary was not "the end" – transforms into Mary. His perception of Ade, too, changes with this event for he views Ade's actions as directed towards him. Indeed, Joe

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<sup>204</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 14.

<sup>205</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 14.

<sup>206</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 15.

<sup>207</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 20.

foresees Ade as representative of "a new generation of Beuyan [*sic*] *élite*."<sup>208</sup> With this observation, Ade's rape of Mary is not just patriarchal misogyny. It symbolizes class divisions, of the *élite* against the C.B.'s. Ade's rape of Mary forewarns of potential future African leadership and their willingness to exploit others for personal gain.

Mary subsequently commits suicide. She leaves a note explaining her situation: she is pregnant and she names Ade as the father. As a result, Ade is expelled from the missionary school. Joe and Santigie, unaware as to why Ade was expelled, learn of Mary's death through Father O'Don. O'Don expresses pity Mary and explicitly references her primitive concoction of poisons. On the other hand, Joe's thoughts turn back to Ade's actions. It may not simply have been a case of exploitation, but an attempt for Ade to demonstrate his masculine dominance over Joe through violent sexuality. Joe wonders if Ade knew of his experience with O'Don. At this point, Joe as has never broached the topic nor has Maddy portrayed O'Don's relationship with Joe as inappropriate or sexually suggestive. Joe narrates his memories:

His thoughts were constantly haunted by that unexpected gesture. After that incident Padre had joked with him about man's love for his fellow man. It was a strange and curious experience which he had to live with. He did not dare speak of it. Not yet and not to Ade or Santigie. Perhaps Ade knew about it. He must.

Perhaps that was why he did what he did to Mary to see how he, Joe, would react.

No! Impossible! Ade knew nothing.<sup>209</sup>

Joe cannot fully articulate his memories and he "not dare speak of it," at least "not yet," to either Santigie or Ade. His rationale, illogical at best, presumes Ade raped Mary as some type of test to "see how he would react." Mary functions as a heterosexual, masculine litmus test, a mere tool

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<sup>208</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 15.

<sup>209</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 31.

designed to identify Joe's response to violent masculinity. Joe allows Ade to blackmail and rape Mary thereby making him complicit with the event, and, subsequently, Mary's suicide. Her death is overshadowed by Joe's questions about why Ade raped Mary and how it may affect him. His reaction and subsequent internal thoughts embellish his lack of empathy towards women. Indeed, his inability to relate emotionally with Mary represents his failure to empathize with women in general.

Mary comes to symbolize female debasement in the face of sexual desire and complicity with patriarchal, heterosexual inequity. Joe accuses Mary of destroying any potential future relationships he may have had with women: "Mary, she killed any feeling I possess for a woman."<sup>210</sup> Every subsequent woman whom Joe sleeps with – for Mary was not "the end" – resembles Mary. Except at the very moment Ade rapes Mary, Joe blames her for Ade's expulsion thereby reaffirming his relationship with *élites*. Even as an adult, during his conversation with Bodil, Joe reflects on Ade and Mary. After haphazardly bringing up the incident during their talk, to which Joe asks if Ade told her about "his tragedy," Joe tries to downplay the actual events. Furthermore, rather than concede that Mary, not Ade, was the victim, he brushes the story off as "just one of those things boys do without thinking."<sup>211</sup> He continues: "To tell you the truth, I started it all but in the end he suffered for me."<sup>212</sup> With no mention of Mary, Joe erases her traumatic experiences, transforming them into mere child's play, as something "boys do." He further elaborates that Ade's "very strict and religious" parents prevented Ade from "defend[ing] himself."<sup>213</sup> How exactly Ade would defend himself is unknown since Joe states that they must wait for Ade's return before they can continue the conversation. Joe respects Ade,

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<sup>210</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 23.

<sup>211</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 176.

<sup>212</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 176.

<sup>213</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 176.

regardless of their now tepid relationship, since Ade accepted his role as the accused. In doing so, he granted Joe a second opportunity to continue his education.

Mary haunts Joe and reappears during moments of heterosexual intimacy. One night after failing one of his exams, Santigie declares that he is "going out to get drunk and find a prostitute."<sup>214</sup> Santigie asks Joe to join. Initially wary of his offer, Joe decides to join in. After many drinks, they return home with a young woman, or, as the narrator callously interjects, "what was left of it."<sup>215</sup> The woman reminds Joe of Mary. "Not much younger than Mary," he thinks, as he watches Santigie lead her to his bed. The scene unfolds as follows:

Without much ado Santigie turned off the light and took the girl to bed. Like an undefended child astray, she submitted without fuss. Soon Santigie was asleep and snoring. Joe thought he might have a go. Not that it would mean anything to him, but just for the fun of it. She felt him reaching out to her. She did not move or complain; just like Mary. Free for all. Joe Bengoh jumped out of the bed. He switched on the light.

The girl sat up and watched him. He was breathing heavily. Suddenly he burst into a loud cry of pain followed by curses.

‘Filth...dirt...liars, ingrate...you cheats...Women, you women!’

He was pointing his finger at the girl’s face.

‘You dirty little slut, I have known your kind, you killers of love and life...you...you...’<sup>216</sup>

Once again, Joe remembers Ade's mother's words as well as his experience with Mary. The

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<sup>214</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 83.

<sup>215</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 83.

<sup>216</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 84.

unnamed woman is "free for all" as she quietly submits to Joe's touch. Yet, Joe expresses shock at her causal acceptance of his embraces and accuses her of sexual impropriety. Such complicity reveals women to be "killers of love." From this moment onward, Joe rejects heterosexual relationships for women cannot be trusted nor do they live by a respectable moral code. Joe's violent reaction causes Santigie to awaken. A nightmare caused his outburst, Joe says, "something which happened to me some time ago."<sup>217</sup> Santigie and the shaken woman accept his explanation and drift back to sleep.

Joe's misogynistic tendencies culminate within this scene yet presents contradictory views of women: on the one hand, women are sexual objects for the pleasure of men. On the other hand, in existing as sexual objects, they lack any moral compass, which renders them disgusting. This latter sentiment drives Joe to reject heterosexual relationships and fully accept homosexuality. Homosexuality, then, is a chosen response against heterosexuality, particularly since Joe equates women with disgust. The girl, as do all other women with whom Joe sleeps, operates as a surrogate of Mary and represents women in their entirety. He is aware that the woman will not resist since he just witnessed Santigie take the woman "without fuss." And, with this in mind, he decides to have a bit of "fun." She is simply a body and the act "would [not] mean anything to him." His perspective of "fun" culminates in an explosive rant: the woman, with her lack of sexual mores, represents all of womanhood. Sitting in the darkness, Joe thinks to himself, "'Women!...I hate them. They are dirty and smelly and cheap. Women! why did God have to create such destructive creatures?' Thinking back on his days in Bauya, he thought, 'This is the last time in my life that I will get this close to smelling and touching a woman's body. The

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<sup>217</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 84.

last encounter.’”<sup>218</sup> Women are the same in Bauya and London: easily bought and relegate sexual intimacy to mere financial gain. His outburst transforms all women into figures of disgust: "Filth...dirt....," he thinks. He becomes overwhelmed with hatred and vows to never again touch or smell another woman. The episode solidifies his negative visceral reactions and blatant distrust towards women.

I find Sara Ahmed's notion of disgust as “sticky” helpful in this instance since she suggests that disgust “operates as a contact zone; it is about how things come into contact with other things.”<sup>219</sup> To touch a disgusting object is to become contaminated. Joe's violent bodily reaction – he literally flings himself out of bed – is caused by two things: the woman's casual acceptance of his advances and his close proximity to her. The woman is not an inherently disgusting object; however, her behavior transforms her into one. This suggests that non-disgusting objects can also be made into disgusting objects. Ahmed argues that performative speech acts possess the capability of making an object disgusting: “To name something as disgusting is not to make something out of nothing. But to say something is disgusting is still to ‘make something’; it generates a set of effects, which *then adhere as a disgusting object*.”<sup>220</sup> In effect, Joe creates his own disgusting object, calling her "filth" and "dirt." His performative speech actions operate as projective disgust whereby he externalizes his negative perceptions and further exacerbates his distrust towards women.

In effect, Joe's first heterosexual experience with Mary and his subsequent experience with the unnamed woman results in an adamant distrust and visceral rejection of heterosexuality, thus reinforcing his homosexuality. He cannot fathom further relationships with women –

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<sup>218</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 84-5.

<sup>219</sup> Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Routledge, 2004, pp. 87.

<sup>220</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 93.

intimate or platonic – for they are untrustworthy and incapable of exhibiting authentic forms of love. His homosexual development coincides with several negative heterosexual experiences. Joe's homosexuality, then, is not innate or inborn; rather, it stems, in part, from his negative visceral reactions towards women. And yet, Joe cannot perform typical socially determined masculine acts, such as keeping women in line. Rather, he embraces the stereotype of the effeminate homosexual man.

During Santigie's raucous farewell party at a local bar, Joe pays close attention to his physical appearance and projects an inherent femininity. The scene is an aberration since his infatuation with appearance does not meld with his character nor do such characteristics return at any other point in the novel. Nevertheless, Joe's inability to handle verbal and physical assault is offset by Santigie's hypermasculine strength and power. The scene begins as follows: "Joe was effeminate in his attitudes, movements and manners. He enjoyed looking at himself in the mirror. He thought he was the most handsome and most refined among men of his age in Bauya."<sup>221</sup> The primary issue is not that Joe could exhibit these qualities; it is that Joe had not exhibited these characteristics prior to this scene nor does he do so afterwards. Effeminacy, in this instance, revolves around appearances and social projection: Joe concerns himself with these qualities as opposed to, as exhibited later by Santigie, physical strength. To note Joe's effeminacy is to note his difference, that he is not a typically Bauyan man. Therefore, he is different and out of place. After consuming several alcoholic drinks, Joe condemns a random woman for her lack of class. The woman responds with a fury of slaps to the face. She shouts, "'You will show me today if you it be a man!'" For a proper Bauyan man would instinctive know how to control an uncontrollable woman. The gathering crowd, too, does not see a Bauyan man, but a "boy" who

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<sup>221</sup> Maddy, pp. 64.



does not convincingly embody normative gendered ideals. Men are understood as physically superior, and thus social dominant, to women:

'E be big mouth boy. 'E nor fit do you anythin'. 'E be boy,' everybody shouted, enjoying the spectacle. Joe could not get himself to hit the girl. He dodged her slaps but she hit him and pushed him against the wall, hitting his head against the wall.<sup>222</sup>

Joe refuses to strike back and takes the abuse as offered by the woman and the crowd. Santigie, watching the scene from a distance, becomes involved once the woman's boyfriend injects himself into the situation. Rather than head the man off, Santigie charges the woman and strikes her across the face. Santigie is a lady's man and knows exactly how to deal with an unruly woman. The boyfriend – much larger than Santigie – charges towards him. However, Santigie embodies hyper-masculinity – he is a wrestler who has only been taken down once (similar to Okonkwo's defeat of the Cat in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*) – and easily throws the man out of the second-story window. The aftermath is a stream of the woman's curses.

Joe lacks masculinity – a lack so apparent that onlookers clearly perceive him as less than a man ("‘E be boy") – in relation to Santigie's remarkable strength and dominating stature. Joe's failure to harness and express his "natural" masculinity by hitting the woman is apparent to all onlookers; he would rather dodge the woman's incoming blows than physically retaliate. But the scene also promotes a paradox: Joe's effeminate characteristic prevents his physical retaliation yet a woman attacks him. Would this not then suggest that women are capable of protecting themselves? The woman, though, is called a "Kroo" woman, a designation not of ethnicity but of neighborhood affiliation. Apparently, Kroo women exhibit more violent tendencies as compared

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<sup>222</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 64.

to other women and require certain methods of containment. Santigie is known to have two Kroo lovers so he knows what must be done. Nevertheless, Joe's narcissistic airs and effeminate fixation on appearances reveals him to be all bluster with no bite.

Another critical point during Joe's sexual development is his relationship with the white missionary Father O'Don, also known as Padre. Joe does not disclose his relationship with O'Don until after the events with Mary. Yet, reconstructed linearly, Joe's first sexual experience occurs with O'Don. Joe calls this first event the "incident." Several "incidents" subsequently occur over Joe's tenure at the school. He recollects his first sexual encounter with O'Don immediately after learning of Ade's expulsion. Overcome with panic, he hopes to speak to someone "about anything": "He had to be with Bola [a prostitute] or someone who would talk to him, just talk, about anything, anything that had nothing to do with Mary or Ade's tragedy or the incident with Padre. His thoughts were constantly haunted by that unexpected gesture. After that incident Padre had joked with him about man's love for his fellow man. He did not dare speak of it. Not yet and not to Ade or Santigie."<sup>223</sup> He never reveals these shameful memories to anyone since a homosexual relationship is something he "not dare speak of." As he reminisces on Ade's expulsion and O'Don's sexual exploitation, O'Don casually enters his bedroom. Joe wears only a pajama top and tries to "hide his private parts":

He stood there, smiling and looking pious and holy. He held his shirt in front of him to hide his private parts. He stood there. Padre moved closer to him patted him [*sic*] on the head and said,

'Go to sleep, Joe, you look tired.'

He obeyed Padre, reaching for his pajama trousers.

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<sup>223</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 31.

‘You have a beautiful body, Joe. Never be ashamed of it. Don’t hide it, my son. You must come swimming with me. Good night.’ He turned off the light and disappeared into the corridor.<sup>224</sup>

Padre, the embodiment of institutional and spiritual power, controls Joe and his surroundings. He represents Christianity and the British empire, and his actions underscore the "paradigm" between the "links between colonialism and homosexuality" whereby "European men [take] advantage of the colonial situation, and the benefits of foreign status, to extract sexual favours from foreign men or subaltern Europeans."<sup>225</sup> O’Don sexually-charged paternalistic acts – he pats Joe on the head as if he were a tamed animal – and unwanted leering over Joe’s body relegates Joe into his object, once again transforming African bodies into white European play things. Almost overnight, Joe develops a “feverish taste” for “erotic, men-only, nudy magazines.” Joe does not explain in detail what happened between him and O’Don, leaving any and all explicit details aside.

Years later, Ade and Santigie dramatically reveal their mutual disgust towards Joe’s sexuality as soon as it becomes apparent that their friendships are dissolving. Joe foreshadows this eventual dissolution when he questions why Ade intruded upon he and Mary’s brief moment of intimacy: “Perhaps Ade knew about it. He must. Perhaps that was why he did what he did to Mary to see how he, Joe, would react. No! Impossible! Ade knew nothing.”<sup>226</sup> On the contrary, Ade witnessed Joe and O’Don together. It is unclear whether or not Joe’s homosexuality drove Ade to rape Mary. Ade wishes he told O’Don of Joe’s “perverse character.” He divulges his knowledge once it becomes apparent that the end of their friendship is nigh:

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<sup>224</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 31.

<sup>225</sup> Aldrich, Robert. *Colonialism and Homosexuality*. Routledge, 2003, pp. 367.

<sup>226</sup> Maddy, pp. 31.

‘After you came to the mission, we, Santigie and myself, discovered that we had made a great mistake in not warning Padre about you. You brought your perverse character to the mission. You came there asking for love, craving affection and attention...you suffering orphan...insufferable little you, I watched you when you went to the storeroom with Padre. I watched what you were doing. You and Padre. You were both corrupt, you were both sick. I told Santigie. Ask him. Go on Santigie, tell him he is sick, sick, sick bastard.’ Joe landed Ade a blow on the face. He staggered back. Joe rushed at him, but Santigie pushed him away. Ade surged forward. Joe was determined to hit Ade again. Santigie kept his stand between them. Ade was now shouting at the top of his voice. ‘Were you not naked on the sofa with Padre’s hands all over your body? Did you not have your bottom oiled, you screw scum, you dirty depraved dog?’<sup>227</sup>

Ade implicates Joe as the “passive” recipient of O'Don's sexual advances, equating Joe with a dog desperate for their master's attention. Ade makes explicit the inherent perversity of homosexuality: both Joe and O'Don are "sick" and "corrupt." Joe's orphanhood, Ade suggests, was the primary catalyst for O'Don unmitigated attention towards Joe. His use of animalistic imagery frames Joe as subservient towards O'Don. Furthermore, such imagery is reminiscent of modern political rhetoric that explicitly compares homosexuality with base animalism thereby warranting the systematic eradication of homosexuality for the protection of human civilization. Similarly to Joe's misogynistic perspective, Ade views homosexuality as disgusting and inhuman.

After Joe retaliates against Ade's homophobic comments, Ade continues to verbally

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<sup>227</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 117.

berate him. He lashes out, “Homosex...battyman ...hog boy.” The first two slurs are straightforward: homosex is an abbreviation of homosexual whereas “hog boy” continues the animal imagery, thus equating homosexuality with bestiality. “Battyboy,” however, slightly reinterprets the more common phrase “battyman” and invokes Afro-diasporic connotations, potentially highlighting the slur’s migration from the Caribbean to England. Since Ade never reveals where he heard the term, for a few reasons I surmise that he most likely acquired the term from Caribbean immigrants. Faith Smith contextualizes Caribbean vocabularies about same-sex sexualities and their affiliation with violence, which includes battyman:

...Creole speech is a repository for sexual slurs and sexual violence. A vocabulary of local, insider’s names – *battyman*, *chichi*, *man*, *tek man*, *maricon*, *makone*, *masisi*, *sodomite*, *Man Royal*, *Aunty/Anti-Man* – is a rich source of abusive terms for women and men who diverge from the procreative trajectories of national or ethnic collectives and encodes a range of sexual and political desires. These are all local names reflecting local propensities for (at least) rhetorical violence, just as there are many Creole names for ‘pounding’ a woman during violent sex with her.<sup>228</sup>

Ade’s malicious usage of battyboy aligns with Smith’s cultural contextualization. Ade associates homosexuality with white colonialism and a failure to abide by Bauyan standards of masculinity. Joe’s invents his own term to ensconce some possibility of liberation; however, the vast number of pejoratives deriding his sexuality may be too much to overcome. Battyboy also indicate Joe’s failure to abide by Bauyan masculine norms. For, as Rosamond S. King writes, the term also implies gendered violence:

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<sup>228</sup> Smith, Faith. “Introduction: Sexing the Citizen.” *Sex and the Citizen*, edited by Faith Smith. University of Virginia Press, 2011, pp. 9-10.

The conceptual and legal distinctions between sexuality and gender are, however, overshadowed by colloquial understandings that lock sex and gender together into one body. Consider the following list of more or less pejorative Caribbean terms for effeminate and/or same-sex-desiring men: *maricón*, *makómé* [*sic*], *loca*, *nicht*, *batty bwoy*, and *boeler/buller*. What all of these terms, save the last, have in common is that they, like the laws meant to suppress them, focus at least as much on gender expression as they do on sexual behavior or desire.<sup>229</sup>

Of the three pejoratives, *battyboy* embellishes Ade's derision towards Joe's failure to embody proper masculine characteristics and his homosexuality. Additionally, it exemplifies the transnational nature of homophobia.

Ade threatens Joe with a call to the police in the immediate aftermath of their confrontation. Considering the conversations anti-homosexuality rhetoric, it is conceivable to interpret this threat as not simply an accusation of assault, but as a reflection of English sexuality laws. Unfortunately, Maddy does not provide a clear chronological timeframe nor does he clearly indicate the boys' ages, thereby rendering claims about the illegality of homosexuality speculative. However, considering Joe's several encounters with people who openly question Joe's sexuality and Ade's threat, it is important to recognize English legal statutes about homosexuality and same-sex relations around the time of the novel's publication and during the novel's timeframe. For if London, and Europe in general, is considered a bastion of sexual freedom as compared to Bauya, then it is critical to address contemporary legal ramifications for practicing homosexuality.

There is one possible issue concerning the novel's timeframe and the legality of

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<sup>229</sup> King, pp. 70.

homosexuality in England. Legally speaking, the three boys are of the same age – specifically Ade's age – since Santigie and Joe obtained birth certificates identical to Ade's as his parents supported European bureaucratic systems. Ade never reveals his age, however, so it is impossible to pinpoint their exact ages. Since all three legally entered into English universities upon arrival, the boys must at least be eighteen years of age. Their length of stay in England suggests that the novel transpires over the course of, at minimum, four years. During this time, Ade earns a degree in journalism and plans to depart from London soon after graduation. It is safe to assume, then, that at the novel's conclusion all three are in their early 20s. Furthermore, the novel's chronological timeframe plays an important role. In 1967, the English Parliament decriminalized homosexuality with the passage of the Sexual Offences Act 1967. Prior to the Sexual Offences Act, male homosexuality was deemed illegal under the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885. The Sexual Offences Act legalized homosexuality between two men – technically “parties” but the language addresses men specifically – who attained the age of twenty-one thereby promoting age requirements for homosexual relations, not unlike heterosexual relations. Comparatively, in 1973, the age of consent for heterosexual relations was sixteen. Joe's age, then, may preclude him from participating in homosexual acts since his age is never verified. If the aforementioned timeline is correct, Joe participated in illegal sexual acts regardless of the passage of the Sexual Offences Act 1967. Furthermore, Joe admits to having “orgies” in his apartment, which, if the law is on the books, renders such acts illegal since the law explicitly references relations consisting of “more than two persons” as inapplicable within the law's confines.<sup>230</sup> Ade's threat, then, underscores the potential legal ramifications behind Joe's openness towards his sexuality. Not only does Joe face homophobic violence from his two

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<sup>230</sup> See Kate Gleeson's "Freudian Slips and Coteries of Vice: The Sexual Offences Act of 1967."

best friends, he also faces the possibility of state retribution for his sexuality.

Potential legal issues aside, Joe's gradual development and acceptance of his sexuality are the centerpiece of his narrative arc. Whereas his earlier experiences with Father O'Don and women led him to reject female companionship, several other experiences while in England centralize his conscious self-fashioning. Two moments stand out: his declaration "Afro-queer" during a conversation with his drama school principal and his final conversation with Bodil where he openly declares his sexuality.

The first occurs midway in the novel after Joe experiences a difficult semester at university. Joe's school principal informs him of his academic inconsistency and potential expulsion due to poor performance. On the last day of the semester prior to winter break, Joe and the principal meet to discuss Joe's future. Upon concluding their conversation, the principal blatantly questions Joe's sexuality – "Are you a homosexual?" Joe fabricates an answer: his affiliations with men are meant to protect white women from overt racism. Whatever she may have heard or, as Joe asks, "personally suspect[s]," is without merit. Appeased by his answer, the principal ends the meeting, once again threatening Joe about his academic performance. Joe leaves, wondering if he should have told her the truth since "respected her" and thought her an "angel." Joe replays the conversation and imagines a markedly different response, one that could throw her into shock: "I should have told her I was a corrupt pervert, an Afro-queer. Perhaps she would have burst into hysterics, maybe she would have screamed and fainted."<sup>231</sup> Joe intertwines "corrupt pervert" with "Afro-queer," a point Marc Epprecht views as an intrusion of "strongly homophobic" perspectives.<sup>232</sup> Considering the novel's 1973 publication date, "queer" was still

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<sup>231</sup> Maddy, pp. 90.

<sup>232</sup> Epprecht, Marc. *Heterosexual Africa?: The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS*. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2008: 140-41.



strongly associated with "gay bashers and homophobes."<sup>233</sup> Furthermore, this moment also suggests self-preservation. He recognizes English socio-cultural perspectives concerning homosexuality. Rather than explicitly state his sexuality, he uses the protection of women from racist attacks as his excuse for befriending men. To admit his sexuality may cause his greater academic problems, perhaps even leading to his expulsion. His refusal to answer may also simply reflect his unwillingness to freely disclose personal information.

He continues with his imagined response and questions the principal's knowledge of Africa. The principal becomes a symbol of the whole of English society and its mythological perceptions of Africa. "Gosh! Madam, don't you realize that my people and continent are as old as yours, and that we too have our women of evil repute and capricious magnanimity? Of [*sic*] Africa,<sup>234</sup> my lovely Africa, why do people believe that you are green and pure, and innocent and virtuous?"<sup>235</sup> He critiques mythical fabrications of Africa created by "people" – i.e. the English – and suggests that homosexuality is not uncommon amongst Africans. Furthermore, Joe links African purity with the land. He equates Africa as a landscape with its inhabitants. Perhaps harkening to the Africa-as-Eden trope or a "black Arcadia," a romantic myth predominately affiliated with South Africa that perceives the African as an untouched reservoir of geological bounty and views its inhabitants as remnants of humanity's "innocent and virtuous" beginnings.<sup>236</sup> He connects the African landscape with his inhabitants, noting that neither landscape nor its peoples are without fault. Joe views the principal's question, then, as not just about his personal life; it also reflects her personal perceptions about African sexuality. He

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<sup>233</sup> Zabuz, pp. 88.

<sup>234</sup> The 1996 publication reads "Oh Africa."

<sup>235</sup> Maddy, pp. 90.

<sup>236</sup> One of the best examples of the "black Arcadia" trope is Robert Russell's *Natal: The Land and Its Story*, published in 1891. Marc Epprecht briefly explores this trope in *Welcome to Greater Edendale*.

concludes his imagined response with a comparison between England and Bauya: "I have not seen more rust, more stains, more primitive rituals and promiscuity or permissiveness in your continent than I have experienced in my little Bauya."<sup>237</sup> Again, he critiques European fantasies of an untouched Africa, one premised up a point that does not hold up against historical representations of black African bodies. At this point, Joe's imagined response ends due to Michael's interruption.<sup>238</sup>

Joe's evocative declaration of "Afro-queer" retains a radical bent. His imagined response suggests an interconnected relationship between Africa as landscape, Africans as European construct, and sexuality. In his refusal to allow others to dictate his sexuality, he re-members a different identity, one premised upon his being African and black as well as queer, three negatively represented identities, at least amongst white Europeans. He embraces the negative not in a self-defeating or self-hating manner; rather, he acknowledges the negative so as to

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<sup>237</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 90.

<sup>238</sup> This scene is of interest due to its alterations between first editions and later editions published in 1996. Latter editions conclude upon Joe's "rust" observations, whereas earlier editions include several additional sentences and delve further into Joe's negative perceptions of women.<sup>238</sup> Furthermore, the excised sentences resuscitate black African hypermasculinity as a potential source for subduing overreaching white women. The excluded sentences read as follows:

'You wouldn't be living there a spinster, at your age. By jove! you would have been had for a lovely stroke. Boundary! Perhaps you would have tried the screaming game? Fighting, kicking, biting, and scratching with your fingernails? That's the idea; the more you fight the more we like it. Violent, sadistic, raw and hot like a flick knife on a warm throat. Slash! Blood! and the deed is done.'<sup>238</sup>

Joe imagines the principal's rape and murder at the hands of African men. Joe imagines her a "spinster," perhaps in self-appealing vengeance for her questioning of his sexuality. As the previous sentences worked to undo European epistemologies of Africa, these edited sentences fall into stereotypes of a virile black masculinity. Furthermore, it is a masculinity rife with desire for sexual domination. Whereas the principal lives freely in England, her supposed sexual chastity would be immediately extinguished to the point of death. Joe, too, envisions himself a member – suggested with the pronoun "we" – as he interjects himself into the rape/murder. He forgets his personal history with watching/participating in rape and imagines a gruesome scene of vengeance.

upend the "black Arcadia" trope. As noted, he connects "corrupt pervert" with "Afro-queer"; yet perceived perversions – the women of "evil repute" and "primitive rituals and promiscuity" – discredit pervasive European fabrications of an Edenic Africa. He aligns Afro-queer with "black Arcadia," and, as a result, re-members himself. He effectively denounces stereotypes of what it means to be an African man. This moment, however, is fleeting. Joe does not embellish this newfound sense of "Afro-queerness" nor does he acknowledge himself as such at any other point within the novel.

Joe never rearticulates the phrase Afro-queer. Nevertheless, he gradually adopts a more direct approach when asked about his sexuality. This is most evident in the novel's final pages during a conversation with Bodil, Ade's fiancé. They had met previously, but exchanged nothing but pleasantries. Upon receiving an invitation to Ade and Bodil's wedding in Denmark, Joe makes a brief excursion to Denmark via Italy. He arrives at their apartment to find that Ade is not home – he is off sleeping with Bodil's friend. She asks Joe to wait for Ade. After a bit of small talk – the weather in Bauya compared to Greece or Morocco – the conversation drastically turns to Joe's spell in the mental hospital. Bodil, uncomfortable with Joe's personal revelation, asks if Joe wishes to wait for Ade any longer since she does not know when he will return. Joe tells her that he will wait only a bit longer for he is on his way to Italy to be with his boyfriend, Michael. Bodil, perhaps exhibiting the principal's imagined shocked expression, responds with consternation: "'Your boy-friend [*sic*]?' she came back with a stunned surprise. Surely Ade was Joe's most important friend. Not someone in Rome."<sup>239</sup> Joe perceives her astonishment and suggests that Ade must have told her little about him:

'Well, he has, but it was a long time ago, and it had nothing to do with this boy-

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<sup>239</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 173.

friend who is drawing you away from him.'

'I am homosexual.'

'You talk about it?'

'I talk about it just as you would say to anyone, Ade is your fiancé.'

'You are the first African male I have known who...'

'How many Africans do you know?'

'Quite a few.' She felt as if she had offended him.

'Well, now that you know, I hope you will start seeing Africans with a different eye. We are like other people of other continents.'<sup>240</sup>

Her initial reaction to Joe's use of the term boyfriend is one of disbelief. At first, she understands the term to equate to a platonic relationship. Since Ade is Joe's best friend, no other boy could take his place. Joe immediately recognizes her misinterpretation and states that he is a homosexual. Her response suggests that homosexuality is not a common topic of conversation. His open acceptance of his sexuality – he does not wait for Bodil to ask about his sexuality nor does he view his sexuality as secretive – shocks her. He naturalizes his relationship with Michael, noting that it is similar to her relationship with Ade.

His subdued response to Bodil's confusion indicates his maturation. In an effort to humanize Africans, he calmly suggests that Africans are like all people, capable of various sexualities. On the contrary, Bodil notes that her knowledge about African male sexuality stems from her many acquaintances. Joe denounces her misconceptions – her unquestioned interpretation of "boy-friend" as primarily suggesting a friend who is a boy versus a romantic partner – and throws Bodil into confusion much like Joe's earlier imagined scenario with the

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<sup>240</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 173.

principal. A mature and self-aware Joe reshapes his world by teaching others about their misperceptions. Bodil accepts Joe's argument; she never questions the veracity of his sexuality or the humanity of Africans. Hell breaks loose, however, once Bodil learns of Ade's affair with one of her best friends – a letter arrives from her friend that details her and Ade's relationship – which is then exacerbated upon Ade's arrival. As Joe leaves, he and Bodil share a brief moment. She tells Joe to enjoy himself with Michael to which Joe responds approvingly. Maddy's representations of homosexuality conclude on a positive note. Because Joe eventually accepts himself and his sexuality, he symbolizes personal growth and maturation. He recognizes his friends' penchant for social discord and their vitriolic attitudes towards Joe's sexuality, and in an effort to save himself from any further psychological harm, he leaves for Italy.

As Joe discovers himself, Santigie and Ade, on the other hand, fail to recognize their essential flaws: Santigie blames his educational failures on systemic racism while Ade youthful rebellion peters out to accept his role as a "black European." Their roles as hypermasculine figures represent the failures of patriarchal dominance. Santigie and Ade function as heterosexual foils against Joe's homosexuality whereby heterosexuality symbolizes corruption and personal degradation against a self-creating, humanistic homosexuality. Joe's queer relationships embellish mutual respect whereas his, as well as Ade and Santigie's, heterosexual relationships reinforce masculine dominance. If homosexuality offers alternative modes of interpersonal equality, then heterosexuality reinforces male hierarchy over women.

Maddy uses Ade and Santigie's sexual exploitation of women to develop his ardently anti-patriarchal and anti-hypermasculine perspective. Several examples include: Ade's blackmail and rape of Mary; Ade and Santigie's leering voyeurism and potential assault towards a woman at the train station; Santigie's rape as revenge politics; and Ade's financially motivated

engagement with Bodil. Every relationship Santigie and Ade form is designed to retain personal power, be it sexual, economic, or psychological. Ade uses his relationship with Bodil, a white Danish woman, to garner financial wealth by mingling with Bodil's father's personal acquaintances. Santigie, on the other hand, uses his black sexuality to attract white women for the primary purpose of revenge for imperial white male sexual exploitation of black African women. Furthermore, Ade and Santigie spout homophobic rhetoric in light of Joe's sexual awakening. They deem Joe to be incompatible with their hypermasculine perspectives, shower Joe with homophobic slurs, and openly chastise his relationship with Michael.

Maddy rationalizes Santigie's actions while maintaining Ade's antagonistic personae. Santigie's prime motivation behind his rape as revenge politics stems from historical English racism, colonialist sexual exploitation of African women, and his thrice-repeated failings of his General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) examinations. Without a secure educational background, Santigie appears to turn to male prostitution as a source of income yet hides the fact in his black nationalist rhetoric. In his final conversation with Joe, Santigie historicizes his policy as one based in colonial vengeance: European colonialists raped African women. To even the score, he must do the same to white women, a strong allusion to Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*. Maddy, however, does not vilify Santigie; rather, he draws a sympathetic portrait of Santigie's empathetic personality. On the other hand, Ade's rape of Mary and unapologetic exploitation of women for personal financial gains affirms his status as a "quintessential misogynist."<sup>241</sup> Although Maddy drops Ade's narrative over the latter portions of the novel, he occasionally reappears as the embodiment of homophobia.

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<sup>241</sup> Zabus, pp. 87.

As Ade disappears, Santigie emerges as pointed critic of white supremacy and advocate of black nationalist thought. He comes to reflect what Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks calls "political masculinism," a form of masculinity described by Frantz Fanon in his works *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*. Political masculinism is "actually part of a larger struggle for the decolonization of all – black and white, male and female – from relations of power that dehumanize and depersonalize humans." The "rehabilitation of masculinity" is necessary for "political struggle and national sovereignty."<sup>242</sup> Santigie's political masculinism encapsulates black nationalism alongside personal experiences as he views his educational failures and feelings of emasculation through the lens of white supremacy. Early on, Maddy appears to support Santigie's political liberation as he dedicates over ten pages of text to one of Santigie's speeches. However, later in the novel, Santigie advocates for an Eldridge Cleaver-esque rape-as-revenge policy, which Maddy rejects and uses Joe as a foil to such action. In this case, Santigie deviates from political masculinism since he perceives white women as objects of white male control as well as objects that can be exploited for the sole purpose of harming white men. In effect, he continues the dehumanization of women that all of the Brothers Three participate in. Santigie's speech, however, hints at his later rape-as-revenge plan, but the majority white audience does not take him seriously.

For reasons unknown – this has more so to do with poor narrative construction – Santigie gives an end of the year lecture at his university. It is revealed after the speech that Santigie failed his G.C.E. examinations for the third time, effectively ending his university career. In his speech, he questions his being the despised "other," the site of English hatred, while other "strangers go undetected":

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<sup>242</sup> Seshadri-Crooks, Kalpana. "'I am a Master': Terrorism, Masculinity, and Political Violence in Frantz Fanon." *Parallax*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2002, pp. 96.

'We, me and you, are living together. Perhaps I should say we are experimenting how best to live together peacefully and amicably. It is not easy. No. It never has been easy to live together with strangers. I am a stranger. It is not only a burden, it is a torture. But, am I the only stranger? Why am I the target? Why am I the always-detected villain? I have seen other strangers go undetected. Unpunished! Unmolested! Untortured! I have seen your grin changed to warm laughter. Your sneers to hospitality. Your resentment to loving kindness. You offer yourself and all you have willingly to them, and they are strangers like me. But you do me in. Why? Funny...'243

Santigie speaks for Africa and all African immigrants, pointing out English hypocrisy and racism and historical truths of colonialism and their continued influence within contemporary society. His is a perpetual outsider, lecturing the predominately white audience about systemic racism and what it feels like to be a product of English colonialism yet simultaneously despised for participating within English society.

His lengthy speech concludes with a lightly veiled threat towards white manhood through destruction of white womanhood. Whereas his opening remarks suggested hope towards racial harmony, his final words foreshadow his politically motivated acts of rape against white women.

'I know you are jealous of me, jealous of your women. That's where I take my cue. I will not break the law. I will not irritate you, although I know how very well. I will not accost you. But all these things I will do to your women. You will

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243 Maddy, pp. 91.



see it. I will let you see me do it all....'<sup>244</sup>

His revenge ignores the individuality and freedom of white women. They are mere objects controlled and owned by white men. Violent actions towards women operate as a direct affront against men. As a laugh echoes from the back hall, he responds that he can no longer laugh for he no longer feels like a "decent human being."<sup>245</sup> Europeans have significantly altered Africa's social, cultural, political, and religious landscape and they shall pay for their colonial-era violence towards Africa. He shall become their "jailer and [their] jury."<sup>246</sup> He continues: "I have been given this task because I am well fitted for it. I know how difficult it will be, but I am resolute, even though I am afraid. Your faces are no longer white faces. They have suddenly gained colour."<sup>247</sup> He quickly tempers his threats of retribution and revenge with a tinge of hope under the banner of social progress:

'Whatever we have done, whatever some of us will end up doing that will tarnish our race, remember, you too contributed, and equally too. Remember that we are all guilty because we are all demanding progress. And progress does not belong to one particular race, people, religion, colour or creed.'<sup>248</sup>

The audience cheers at these final words and immediately finds himself swarmed. People debate about Santigie's speech. In the fray of bodies, Joe catches Santigie's attention. Santigie informs him that he has failed his G.C.E. for a third and final time. He will no longer continue his education; rather, he is "going to seek the fullness thereof from the maidens of this land. I will

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<sup>244</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 98.

<sup>245</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 98.

<sup>246</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 98.

<sup>247</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 98.

<sup>248</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 98.

go in search of them."<sup>249</sup> He then bursts into tears. The narrator clarifies Santigie's future intentions: "He was resolute about his decisions. He was going to live on revenge. Sex revenge would be his success – would justify his bitterness towards the people and society he accused of victimization."<sup>250</sup>

Santigie rationalizes his revenge through an historical lens, specifically the systematic oppression of African women by European male colonialists. Marred in racial hatred, he entrenches his rape-as-revenge policy as a response to centuries of European exploitation. Haunted by the systematic removal of male bodies via the Atlantic slave trade, he rejects Joe's claim that slavery "was a long, long time ago":

‘Tell me, did our grandmothers and sisters understand when their brothers and fathers left them with little brown bastard babies? Those who had their arses corked with corn stalks and were thrown overboard into the raging Atlantic ocean because they had caught dysentery and could not stop shitting, did they know what was coming to them?’<sup>251</sup>

Europeans objectified black bodies through the slave trade, transforming Africans into commercial property capable of being discarded due to perceived deficiencies, such as, using Santigie's example, dysentery. For Santigie, these historical abuses reemerge through his personal traumatic, racist experiences whereby he was demonized for his blackness. Upon immigrating to England, he was "made to realize what I look like, and what my place is in the society where I happen to find myself."<sup>252</sup> He becomes aware of the social functionality of his blackness within England and personally intends to exact revenge for the historical wrongs

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<sup>249</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 99.

<sup>250</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 99.

<sup>251</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 164.

<sup>252</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 97-8.

committed against Africa.

Santigie admonishes interracial relationships, thereby promoting racist ideologies.

Santigie's rationale mirrors Eldridge Cleaver's perception of rape as an "insurrectionary act." To quote Cleaver:

It delighted me that I was defying and trampling upon the white man's law, upon his system of values, and that I was defiling his women – and this point, I believe, was the most satisfying to me because I was very resentful over the historical fact of how the white man has used the black woman. I felt I was getting revenge.

From the site of the act of rape, consternation spreads outwardly in concentric circles. I wanted to send waves of consternation throughout the white race.<sup>253</sup>

I do not think it is coincidental that Santigie uses language identical to Cleaver. Santigie views rape as an enactment of historical revenge, of somehow rectifying the rapes of African women through the rapes of white women. Built upon the premise of male dominance over women, he presumes that his victims view themselves *as* victims as opposed to women searching for sexual pleasure. Unlike Cleaver, however, Santigie does not express remorse over his philosophy. He remains deeply invested in this project at novel's end.

Unlike Cleaver, Santigie does not express remorse about his rape-as-revenge policy.

Cleaver reflected on his mindset and his decision to rape white women: "Even though I had some insight into my own motivations, I did not feel justified. I lost my self-respect. My pride as a man dissolved and my whole fragile moral structure seemed to collapse, completely shattered."<sup>254</sup> Santigie, lost and isolated, cannot deviate from his established system. Joe recognizes Santigie's internal struggles, noting, "'Your revenge is only killing you inside, eating

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<sup>253</sup> Cleaver, Eldridge. *Soul on Ice*. Dell Publishing, 1999, pp. 33.

<sup>254</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 33.

you up."<sup>255</sup> Santigie cannot respond; rather, he deflects Joe's remarks to inform him that a woman will arrive shortly. As Joe leaves, the narrator reveals, to use Cleaver's words, a "completely shattered" Santigie: "He longed to be part of the system; a necessity to belong, to have identity, haunted him desperately. He felt that the white authorities victimized him, that his defeat in a strange country was a great humiliation. He wanted to be everyone's friend, loved and welcomed, especially by the English. He could not understand that human nature is not always tolerant, regardless of colour, race, religion, or language."<sup>256</sup> This is Santigie's final moment in the text, and it reveals a decisive split between Santigie's internal thoughts and external actions. He is a man who does not know himself.

Santigie's speech is meant to reflect the Brothers Three's experiences in England. Patrick Muana interprets the speech as an attempt to situate the characters' moral failings in correlation with uncontrollable social circumstances. "[I]f Maddy aims to present his three characters as victims of their societies and social circumstances or as underdogs who represent a subtle value system, then he fails."<sup>257</sup> From rape to theft, from sexual exploitation to potential murder, Muana wonders how readers can support these characters and whether or not Maddy's depictions of unabashed violence – especially as a significant portion is directed towards women – hyperbolize acts of colonial resistance. Of the three, Muana's critique resonates greatest with Santigie, especially since his anti-colonial, anti-racism politics devolves into racial essentialism and what Joe calls "black Nazi" politics.

A conversation between Santigie and Joe dominates the penultimate chapter. Only days prior, Joe revealed that he had been in the hospital after an attempted suicide. Michael, Joe's

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<sup>255</sup> Maddy, pp. 168.

<sup>256</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 167.

<sup>257</sup> Muana, pp. 247.

boyfriend, found him in time, saving his life. The two also spoke of Ade and Bodil's impending nuptials in Denmark and whether they plan to attend. This final conversation takes a different subject: Santigie and Joe's conflicting stances on interracial relationships. Joe is invested in this conversation since his boyfriend is a white Englishman. He envisions a multicultural utopia premised upon a humanist notion of innate human kindness: "I believe that the world can create a universal family, an integrated world of races and religious beliefs, a world with many political differences but still understanding each other's differences. It is not impossible for a black person to find a compatible white companion."<sup>258</sup> Santigie dismisses Joe's proposed multiculturalism, labeling such ideas as "escapist." Joe offers an alternative masculinity built upon monogamy and a cohesive family unit. While there is nothing "queer" about Joe's perspective, it markedly deviates from either Santigie's or Ade's perspectives. Since neither Santigie nor Ade can maintain heterosexual relationships, Joe's call for a multi-racial and multi-faith world, built upon mutual understanding and respect of different beliefs and perspectives, is indeed a call for something new. His final sentiment – interracial relationships – suggests his relationship with Michael, and Ade's relationship with Bodil, as a possibility for the future.

Whereas Ade's final appearance in the novel ends with shouting and his rejection of Joe, Santigie's final appearance represents the downfall of political masculinity. Whereas Joe expresses hope for an unknowable future, Santigie desires racial segregation. Why he remains in London is unknown – his family remains in Bauya – except that his political revenge has yet to be fully enacted. He expresses distrust towards Joe's utopic visions, and after Joe denounces his racial essentialism he asks Joe to leave as one of his returning "victims" is to arrive shortly. The suggestion that women return perhaps points to Santigie's profession: he may be a prostitute. His

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<sup>258</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 166.

continued disdain towards whiteness and rejection of interracial relationships may in fact be in response to his dependency on white customers. Like white European colonialists who sexually exploited African women, Santigie views himself as an historical continuation of white supremacy.

### *Conclusion*

*No Past, No Present, No Future* is a contradictory novel. To suggest that it has a single perspective on homosexuality is to ignore Joe Bengoh's bouts of self-hatred and misogyny, as well as Maddy's incorporation of stereotypes. It is possible to suggest that the novel, too, evolves regarding its representations of homosexuality. From European importation and a response to exploitative and loveless women to a symbol of stability and love, Maddy's depictions of homosexuality mature over the course of the novel. It is not until the novel's final chapters that Joe appears to reject homosexuality as a site of social corruption. Why his perspective alters from chapter to chapter is unclear and perhaps has more to do with slipshod storytelling than anything else. Nevertheless, Joe Bengoh represents an anomaly within African literatures: he is an openly queer man in a loving interracial relationship. Whereas Santigie and Ade fall into personal despair as brought on by heterosexism and hypermasculinity, Joe's narrative concludes with his relationship intact and his future ahead of him. *No Past, No Present, No Future* ultimately rejects the myth of an Edenic Africa, an Africa populated by pure heterosexuality. Maddy's novel, while problematic at times, offers new and different ways of being African within the world. Joe faces a white English society that cannot fully fathom a queer African man. But as shown with his final conversation with Bodil, there is no single way to be African.

### CHAPTER THREE: Sexuality and Gender in *Woubi chéri*

*Woubi chéri*, directed by Parisian filmmakers Laurent Bocahut and Philip Brooks, documents the lives of sexual minorities in Abidjan, the economic capital of Côte d'Ivoire, and perhaps one of the gay-friendliest cities in Africa south of the Sahara.<sup>259</sup> Told from an "internal point of view,"<sup>260</sup> the film delves into the economic survival, interpersonal dynamics, and individual hopes and dreams of the *woubi* community. Barbara, the president of the Ivory Coast Transvestite Association (ICTA) and a self-proclaimed *travesti*, a term comparable to albeit not wholly synonymous with the English word "transvestite," guides viewers as she and fellow ICTA members search for a secure site for an upcoming party.<sup>261</sup> Although the film works towards that end, *Woubi chéri* is about interpersonal communication. Barbara introduces viewers into the *woubi* community by providing basic definitions of frequently used terms and elucidates political and philosophical perspectives held by the community as a whole. Laurent, a *woubi*, speaks about his love towards Jean-Jacques, a *yossi*, and his hopes for their relationship. *Woubi* roughly translates as men who love men and exhibit female gender roles whereas *yossi* translates as men who have sex with men but do not identify as gay and typically perform masculine

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<sup>259</sup> Corey-Boulet, Robbie. "A Fragile Tolerance." *The Caravan* [India]. 1 June 2013.

<sup>260</sup> "Homosexuality." *The Routledge Encyclopedia of African Literature*, 2nd ed., 2009, pp. 226.

<sup>261</sup> Community members occasionally define themselves as transgender (*transgenre*). Thomann and Robbie interviewed Julie, a 24-year old activist and educator at Alternative Côte d'Ivoire, an organization dedicated to HIV/AIDS education, who distinguished herself (*transgere*) from *travestis*. Unlike Barbara's definition, Julie links *travestis* with sex work, although the film makes underscores how some sex workers are *travesti*: "There are transgender people (transgenres [*sic*]) who live strictly as women as often as possible. Like me, like Sarah. There are also travestis who are professional sex workers, some of whom change just at night to do sex work. During the day they are dressed like men. There are also transgenres who are sex workers, like Sarah, who live strictly as women....And there are occasional transgenres who do it maybe just two times each year" (qtd. in Thomann 8). It is unclear what exactly "it" refers to in the final sentence: either sex work or donning clothing of the opposite gender. It is also unclear where these distinctions lie: *travestis* apparently only wear women's clothing at night whereas *transgenres* live as women all of the time. Furthermore, *travesti* and *transgenres* are gendered terms designated for biological men. No one speaks of biological women and gender identity.

gender roles. Two sex workers, Bibiche and Tatiana, discuss their lives as prostitutes and the material and financial benefits of sex work. While Thérèse Migraine-George calls the film a quest for "love and tolerance,"<sup>262</sup> none of the community members, especially Barbara, seek approval or praise. Barbara's militaristic stance, Bibiche's adamant praise of prostitution, and Laurent's unrepentant refusal of heteronormativity demonstrate the community's unwavering stance against so-called "traditional" African values. *Woubi chéri* dedicates screen-time to individual and communal conversations and, by doing so, explores how the well-established community functions within Abidjan society.

Recent political and social turmoil surrounding homosexuality makes *Woubi chéri* a relevant historical document of queer African identities in the mid-to-late 1990s. The film offers a glimpse into a secretive, yet visibly public community and showcases queer activist methodologies and strategies before widespread international concerns about human rights abuses within African nations. Contemporary concerns about homosexuality find footing within the film, especially as members of the community express personal fears about being publically outed in the media, there is also a sense of acceptance amongst people who are unfamiliar with different sexual and gender identities. *Woubi chéri*, being one of the first documentaries on homosexuality in Africa, is an aberration amongst documentaries about queer Africa. It recognizes how the *woubi* – roughly translated as men who love men and exhibit female gender roles – community desires secrecy for personal and communal safety; yet it also frames conversations about sexuality, some of which are very explicit, within open, public settings. The film operates on an ethnographic level where individuals relate how identities function within

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<sup>262</sup> Migraine-George, Thérèse. "Beyond the 'Internalist' vs. 'Externalist' Debate: The Local-Global Identities of African Homosexuals in Two Films, *Woubi Chéri* and *Dakan*." *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1, June 2003, pp. 53.



relationships and the roles each plays within the community. Whereas the aforementioned documentaries highlight the growth of homophobic rhetoric and violence and the necessity for international organization, *Woubi chéri* focuses on the *woubi* community as a community entrenched within Ivorian life. Furthermore, the film layers gender and sexuality together, whereby one does not properly function without the other. Culturally determined gender roles play a significant role amongst the *woubi* community and to ignore the impact of gender is to ignore half of the conversation.

### *"Queer African Cinema"*

Several documentaries about same-sex sexualities and LGBTQ rights in Africa have been released since 2012. In *God Loves Uganda* (2013), African American filmmaker Roger Ross Williams examined evangelical influences from the United States in Ugandan politics and the development of the Ugandan government's anti-homosexuality legislation. American and British filmmakers, respectively, Katherine Fairfax Wright and Malika Zouhali-Worrall produced *Call Me Kuchu* (2012), a documentary about the Ugandan activist organization Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), and its most public member, David Kato. The film details SMUG's legal battles against the local tabloid *Rolling Stone* (no affiliation with the American music magazine) for their publication of personal information and photographs of supposedly gay Ugandans. Los Angeles-based filmmakers Shaun Kadlec and Deb Tullmann directed *Born This Way* (2013), a film about queer Cameroonians. *Tchindas* (2015), an outlier of sorts in terms of its positive representations of trans\* women in the island nation of Cape Verde during Carnival, was directed by two Spaniards, Pablo García Pérez de Lara and Marc Serena. *The Pearl of Africa*, directed by Swedish filmmaker Jonny von Wallström, is an episodic documentary released

online about Cleopatra Kambuga, a trans\* activist who must flee her home in Uganda for a Kenyan haven. The Kenyan film *Stories Of Our Lives* (2015), created by the Nairobi-based arts collective The Nest, dramatizes stories as told by queer Kenyans.<sup>263</sup> Unlike the other documentaries that were directed by Westerners and/or funded by Western cinema organizations, *Stories of Our Lives* was produced, directed, and acted by Africans.<sup>264</sup>

Other examples of African-directed features include Guinean filmmaker Mohammed Camara's *Dakan* (1998), which remains one of only fiction films about male homosexuality. *Rag Tag* (2006), a Nigerian/British film directed by Adaora Nwandu, also broaches the topic of male homosexuality. The Nollywood film *Hell or High Water* (2016) is the first feature to emerge from Nigeria's homegrown film industry to depict homosexuality in a positive light.<sup>265</sup> Several films from South Africa focus on homosexuality, such as *Proteus* (2003), a Canadian/South African production about male homosexuality between a colonial Dutchman and an indigenous man in the eighteenth-century South Africa prison colony, Robben Island. South African documentarian Jack Lewis released two films in the late 1990s, *A Normal Daughter: The Life and Times of Kewpie of District Six* (1997) and *Sando to Samantha aka the Art of Dikvel* (1998), about gay life in Western Cape. Other films, such as Beverley Ditsie's *Simon & I* (2001), a documentary about the gay black anti-apartheid activist Simon Nkoli, and Brian Tilley's *It's My*

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<sup>263</sup> According to their website, The Nest "create[s] work together using visual arts, music and fashion - dissecting and subverting the layers of how Africans are seen and unseen, what Africans can and cannot do, where Africans can and cannot go, and what Africans can and cannot say."

<sup>264</sup> Watson, HG. "Kenyan filmmakers 'come out' ahead of TIFF premiere." *DailyXtra* 5 Sept. 2014.

<sup>265</sup> In 2012, several months prior to the passage of the Same-Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, Nollywood actor Bestwood Chukwuemeka was sentenced to three-months imprisonment "for having sexual intercourse with a man through the anus." The man with whom he slept accused him of the act. Chukwuemeka argued that he "was under the influence of alcohol" at the time. See Monica Mark's "Nigerian court jails actor for homosexuality under colonial law."

*Life* (2003), a film about HIV/AIDS activist Zackie Achmat, frame LGBTQ South Africans as critical pieces for South Africa development and the protection of LGBTQ rights as granted by the South African Constitution. Unfortunately, many of these films are difficult to obtain or have not been distributed for worldwide viewership.

These films reflect what Martin Botha refers to as "Queer African Cinema." Unlike "African Cinema," a label designed for film produced in Africa south the Sahara and typically excludes South African works, Queer African Cinema addresses works from the African continent in its entirety. This is mainly due to the lack of films about queer Africans.<sup>266</sup> With this being the case, South African films comprise a significant portion of the work. For example, in his article on queer African cinema aesthetics, Martin Botha approaches Queer African Cinema through a narrow South African lens. With South Africa being one of the more progressive nations for LGBTQ rights, at least in terms of government support, South African filmmakers have produced a significant number of films featuring homosexual characters over a sixty-year timeframe. South Africa's cinematic history with LGBTQ characters stretches back to the 1950s, thus offering a history upon which to build new queer representations and aesthetics. Early representations of homosexuality were shallow targets of national contempt. Over time, as these representations gradually fleshed out, they transformed into living, round characters. Although earlier representations of homosexuality cast a negative light, Botha argues that they provide evidence of the existence of "gay and lesbian subcultures." South Africa, however, is unique concerning sexualities and LGBTQ rights.

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<sup>266</sup> Which is not to suggest a lack of queer analysis of African films. At the recent "Directions in African Queer Studies" at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada, Lindsey Green-Simms presented a paper entitled "Towards a Queer African Cinema." Likewise, at the annual African Studies Association conference in 2016, Brenna Munro argued for a queer interpretation of the cinematic adaptation of Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*.

Left out of Botha's conceptualization of Queer African Cinema is the connection between gender and sexuality. The growth of international LGBTQ activism has led to the disappearance of gender within discussions of sexuality and, in turn, created gay and lesbian subcultures that can be identified by Westerners. The relative ease of terminological slippage – to define male same-sex sexuality as "gay" or female same-sex sexuality as "lesbian" – highlights the global dominance of Western identity categories. As a result, local cultural nuances of gender and sexuality disappear. Sexuality and sexual identity take precedence over normalized gendered acts. To speak of sexuality without gender in African contexts downplays the importance of gendered acts. Sylvia Tamale writes, "[r]esearching human sexuality without looking at gender is like cooking pepper soup without pepper. It might look like pepper soup but one sip will make it clear that an essential ingredient in this Nigerian specialty is missing."<sup>267</sup> For Tamale, gender and sexuality are "creatures of culture and society and both play a central and crucial role in maintaining power relations in our societies."<sup>268</sup> The films above ignore how gender and sexuality intertwine within each respective country.

Recent documentaries about queer African communities abide by Western conventions of sexuality to articulate a visible queer subject. By visible queer subject, I mean individuals and communities that are easily interpreted as "queer" by Western audiences. In *Call Me Kuchu*, for example, the Swahili term *kuchu* is rarely spoken by members of Sexual Minorities Uganda (SMUG), an activist organization dedicated to the promotion of LGBTQ rights. Nor is the word

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<sup>267</sup> Tamale, Sylvia. "Researching and theorising sexualities in Africa." *African Sexualities: A Reader*, edited by Sylvia Tamale. Pambazuka Press, 2011, pp. 11.

<sup>268</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 11.

explored beyond a surface level conceptualization whereby *kuchu* equates to homosexuality.<sup>269</sup> The film also features several scenes that in Western societies may be defined as a drag ball. Due to a lack of explanation as to their prominence within the *kuchu* community, these scenes promote a distinct universalization of gay identity whereby drag balls reinforce a normalized global gay culture. Whereas members of the *kuchu* community don local clothing, the cultural significance of the clothing is left unexplained. *God Loves Uganda* specifically addresses homosexuality and the globalization of homophobic morality through evangelical organizations from the United States. Here, too, sexuality functions without gender. Mohammed Camara's *Dakan* (1998) briefly identifies conflicts of gender and sexual identity between two cisgender male partners, Manga and Sori, when Manga informs Sori that he wishes to provide him with a child. This suggests Manga's adoption of the role of female; however, the film never develops these gendered distinctions.

*Woubi chéri* refrains from assessments of human rights. Nor does the film expose state-sponsored oppression and discrimination towards queer Ivorians. Unlike recent documentaries, *Woubi chéri* investigates the local *woubi* community, a term that roughly translates as "gay," yet does not have similar cultural or social connotations as it does in Western societies, as they search for a setting to hold their annual celebration. Similarly to *Call Me Kuchu* in this regard, members of the *woubi* community require safe and secure spaces for their members to prevent widespread public exposure. The possibility of retaliation from unwelcoming Ivorians is a real threat. Distinguished for its exploration of gender and sexual identities amongst the community, *Woubi chéri* delves into individual relationships and explores public outreach whereby members

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<sup>269</sup> See Stella Nyanzi's "Dismantling Reified African Culture." Nyanzi interviewed several same-sex loving individuals who rejected *kuchu* because it was "highly politicised, connotated militant activism or radical 'in-your-face' advocacy for sexual minority rights."

of the community speak with people unfamiliar with *woubi-can*. These moments of outreach and conversation reveal people open to understanding what they do not understand, revealing productive conversations with both sides exuding a sense of mutual respect.

*Woubi chéri* reflects a specific period in Ivorian society. The film does not offer a complete picture of the *woubi* community nor does it explore the intricacies of gender relations amongst members. The usage of the word *travesti*, translated into English as "transvestite," presumes a one-to-one correlation. These issues, however, do not diminish the importance of *Woubi chéri* as a film dedicated to the exploration of this unique Ivorian community. Distinguishing between *woubi-can*, a general term used to describe the *woubi* community and its language, and international and Western concepts of LGBTQ identities is pertinent for the film's success. It requires an audience that is aware of the potentially colonizing impact of simply labeling the community LGBTQ.

### *The Gay El-Dorado of Africa*

Abidjan, once called the "Gay El-Dorado" of Africa, is a unique city within Africa south of the Sahara.<sup>270</sup> Abidjan has operated as a safe haven for queer Africans from around the continent, leading to a rich, dynamic queer culture. Research into how Abidjan gained such a reputation is still ongoing. Matthew Thomann, a leading scholar of local queer communities in Abidjan, along with journalist Robbie Corey-Boulet, suggests Abidjan's sexual liberalism developed alongside the nation's post-colonial quest for modernization.<sup>271</sup> Abidjan's development as a hub for queer Africans connects economic prosperity and capitalism, alongside LGBTQ

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<sup>270</sup> Kouassi, Selay Maurius. "Côte d'Ivoire: Is Abidjan Becoming a Gay El Dorado?" *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*. 20 Sept. 2011.

<sup>271</sup> Thomann, Matthew and Robbie Corey-Boulet. "Violence, exclusion and resilience among Ivorian travestis." *Critical African Studies*, 2015, pp. 1-18.

acceptance and visibility.<sup>272</sup> In 1958, French President Charles de Gaulle issued a referendum to colonies seeking independence. He provided three options: to remain a colony, become a member of the Republic, or become part of the newly formed French West African conglomeration. Pro-Western Ivorian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny decided Côte d'Ivoire would become a member state of the French Community in an effort to maintain Côte d'Ivoire's financial ties with France while simultaneously achieving independence. In the 1960s and 1970s, Abidjan benefited from Houphouët-Boigny's "state-capitalist project," known as the "Ivorian miracle," where he made "investments in private industry while providing jobs and improved social services to citizens."<sup>273</sup> With its close economic ties with France and booming agricultural industry centered on cocoa and coffee, Côte d'Ivoire's GDP tripled, resulting in financial stability.<sup>274</sup> Abidjan, already a bustling metropolis housing 1.3 million Ivorians, transformed into a "cosmopolitan capital where new forms of African modernity were emerging."<sup>275</sup> This led to the development of a "modernist, multiethnic urban culture,"<sup>276</sup> and a growth of capitalist enterprises.

Oral histories about the *woubi* community, or, to use Vinh-Kin Nguyen's phrase, the "homosocial scene" known as the "milieu," frame its inception around the early 1970s, particularly around two popular nightclubs.<sup>277</sup> These nightclubs offered spaces for communal

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<sup>272</sup> See Michael Bronski's *The Pleasure Principle*, specifically the chapter "The Construction of a Pleasure Class and the Marketing of Homosexuality" (138-157). Also see Roderick A. Ferguson's *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*.

<sup>273</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 6.

<sup>274</sup> Thomann, Matthew. "The Price of Inclusion": pp. 40-71.

<sup>275</sup> Nguyen, Vinh-Kin. "Uses and Pleasures: Sexual Modernity, HIV/AIDS, and Confessional Technologies in a West African Metropolis." *Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality, and Morality in Global Perspective*, edited by Stacy Leigh Pigg and Vincanne Adams, Duke UP, 2005, pp. 246.

<sup>276</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 245.

<sup>277</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 248.

gatherings without fear of retribution. Over the years, the *woubi* community has gradually embraced a more public persona. In 2009, Abidjan hosted the first annual Miss Woubi beauty pageant. After several successful competitions, the pageant faced unwanted media attention in 2012 after *Allo Police*, an Ivorian tabloid, published pictures of contestants under the headline "The *pédés*<sup>278</sup> of Abidjan have elected their Miss." Fears of renewed efforts against *woubi-can* resulted in the cancellation of the following year's celebration.<sup>279</sup> These fears, however, did not prevent organizers from holding the pageant in 2013. Since 2012, members of the *woubi* community have continued to crown their Miss Woubi. Corey-Boulet, writing of the 2016 pageant, describes the late night/early morning competition where judging began in the early evening hours and concluded at 4 a.m. Corey-Boulet's reporting suggests conflicts between *woubi* and *travesti* community members. This conflict stems from the pageant's treatment of *travestis*, namely that "some Ivorian sexual minorities criticised Miss Woubi for being insufficiently inclusive, especially when it comes to *travestis*."<sup>280</sup> :

The structure of the pageant is intended to downplay these divisions [between *travestis* and *woubis*], instead emphasising the potential for sexual and gender fluidity in everyone. To begin, contestants appeared before the four-person judging panel dressed as *yossis* - the romantic partners of *woubis* "who play the

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<sup>278</sup> Robbie Corey-Boulet, writing for London *Guardian*, notes *pédés* is a common French pejorative for homosexuals. In a separate article co-authored by Matthew Thomann, he includes a lengthier definition: "Though employed much like the English word 'faggot,' the word *pédé* has etymological roots that are significant. It is the apocope of the word '*pédéraste*' which refers to intergenerational relationships between boys and older men in Greek antiquity that were both sexual and educational." See Matthew Thomann and Robbie Corey-Boulet's "Violence, exclusions and resilience among Ivorian *travestis*."

<sup>279</sup> Corey-Boulet, Robbie. "Introducing Miss Woubi, Ivory Coast's unlikely cross-dressing pageant." *The Guardian*. 13 April 2016.

<sup>280</sup> *ibid.*, n.p.



role of the man" and wear what many young local men wear: ripped jeans, trainers, fake gold chains.

[...]

By the second runway round - which showcased "traditional" clothing - the contestants had transformed into women. Holding wooden bowls, they sashayed in outfits made from purple and red fabric inspired by the Malinke ethnic group - a subtle rebuttal to claims that sexual minorities are somehow "un-African."<sup>281</sup>

*Woubis* performed twofold gender identities: the first round parodied their romantic partners with the donning of culturally masculine clothing and comical displays of wealth, such as the fake gold chains. The second round, unlike the first, addressed female-oriented labor, specifically in their display of wooden bowls. Miss Woubi, although couched in sexuality, is in many respects compatible with drag queen communities throughout the Global North. Evidently, participants in the Miss Woubi pageant do not include cisgender or same-sex loving women.

Open celebrations of gender fluidity and sexual identification are not against Ivorian law. There are currently no legal consequences for same-sex sexuality in Côte d'Ivoire, in part due to its being a former French colony. Similarly to their British counterparts, the French colonial government imposed explicit sodomy laws. The penal code reads similarly to many other codes, generally outlawing "acts against nature" and "indecent acts." Côte d'Ivoire has not expanded its legal codes beyond those imposed by colonial France; however, it also has not repealed these laws.

The penal code could be altered for homophobic purposes as other former French African colonies have done. Senegal, for example, criminalized same-sex sexuality comparable to

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<sup>281</sup> *ibid.*, n.p.

Uganda's anti-homosexuality legislation. Article 319 of the Senegalese Penal Code imposes a one-to-five year sentence for individuals convicted of homosexual acts as well as a fine of 100,000 up to 1,500,000 francs.<sup>282</sup> Babacar M'Baye, writing on homophobia in Senegal, suggests that the failed promises made by former President Abdoulaye Wade (2000-2011) for "better wages, improved living conditions, and freedom were largely unfulfilled" influenced Senegal's renewed homophobic rhetoric. Wade's economic and social failures fell onto the backs of homosexuals, effectively acting as scapegoats. He writes, "A significant part of the country's desperation was displaced onto homosexuals and transgender people as many Senegalese retreated into antihomosexual moralistic discourses as a means to appease their rage against a regime that had left the country in shambles."<sup>283</sup> The development of homophobic rhetoric within former French colonies, then, may be a result of poor economic growth. "Such a strategy, of course," writes M'Baye, "places blame on people who are themselves victims of failed national policies as well as of the inequalities in development that persist between Africa and the Western world."<sup>284</sup> Côte d'Ivoire's recent economic and political struggles may have contributed to the growth in homophobic rhetoric by public officials.

The *woubi* community has experienced both a social and governmental pushback in recent years, however, leading to concerns about the possibility of legislation designed to

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<sup>282</sup> Article 319 of the Senegalese Penal Code, as translated from French into English by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, reads as follows: "Without prejudice to the more serious penalties provided for in the preceding paragraphs or by articles 320 and 321 of this Code, whoever will have committed an improper or unnatural act with a person of the same sex will be punished by imprisonment of between one and five years and by a fine of 100,000 to 1,500,000 francs. If the act was committed with a person below the age of 21, the maximum penalty will always be applied." See "Submission in the UPR Review of: Senegal."

<sup>283</sup> M'Baye, Babacar. "The Origins of Senegalese Homophobia: Discourses on Homosexuals and Transgender People in Colonial and Postcolonial Senegal." *African Studies Review*, vol. 56, no. 2 September 2013, pp. 113.

<sup>284</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 113.

criminalize homosexuality, similarly to other nations in Africa south of the Sahara. As a result of the continental spread of homophobia, *woubi* community members and activists have faced numerous bouts of violence. In 2012, members of the Forces Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI), the state-run military organization, raided a bar called Le Club and threatened to arrest members of the *woubi* community if they did not pay bribes. Several *travestis* were "forced to strip in the street before boarding" a military cargo truck intended to transport individuals who failed to cooperate. In 2016, six members of the *woubi* community were accidentally outed by United States embassy officials via social media after they signed a condolence book in commemoration of the massacre at the Orlando, Florida nightclub Pulse. The photo included the caption "LGBTI community signing the condolence book." Although the activists approved of the photograph, they were unaware of the caption.<sup>285</sup> As a result, they were "abused and forced to flee their homes." Louna, one of the photographed individuals, "was walking in his neighborhood when a mob pushed him to the ground, stole his phone and wallet, and beat him."<sup>286</sup> Ivorian minister Gnamien Konan condemned the United States Supreme Court for ruling for gay marriage: "It's an aberration; it is a radical deviation from our moral and cultural values as a people."<sup>287</sup> Ivorian perspectives on homosexuality may be shifting due to several proposals and enactments of anti-LGBTQ laws across the continent. At the time of writing, however, no form of legislation designed to criminalize homosexuality in Côte d'Ivoire has been introduced.

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<sup>285</sup> "Gay men attacked over photo posted by U.S. embassy." *CBSnews.com*. 29 June 2016.

<sup>286</sup> "Six Cote d'Ivoire gay men attacked after U.S. Embassy posts photo of them signing Orlando condolence book."

<sup>287</sup> "Defying Obama, Senegal and Ivory Coast declare they are anti-gay." *The Michigan Citizen*. 21 July 2013.

It is appropriate, then, that a film about conversation has instigated different audience reactions. Ada Uzoamaka Azodo and Maureen Ngozi Eke provide information about a post-screening debate from a Modern Language Association (MLA) conference in December 2001. Azodo participated as the discussion moderator and Eke, who had earlier in the day given a talk on the film, was an audience member. The rest of audience consisted, as with academic conferences, predominantly of scholars. Two divergent opinions emerged. One group mirrored contemporary rhetoric: they viewed homosexuality as a psychological disorder and reflective of Western capitalist influence. Azodo and Eke summarize the argument as follows:

A minority opinion held that it was a recent lifestyle brought about by neocolonial social, economic, and political conditions in African urban areas, which mimic conditions in big cities in the West, where capitalism has pushed human sexual desire into the domain of choice, has separated sexuality from procreation through empowering individuals, materially, to exist comfortably outside of the traditional family space, thanks to their salaried work, and has thus eroded traditional values and support systems for the needy who would ordinarily remain in the family hold and, if not able to do anything else, at least reproduce the next generation of citizens.<sup>288</sup>

This argument resembles contemporary anti-homosexuality sentiments across the continent. Homosexuality in Africa "mimics" Western social structures due to the spread of capitalism. Traditional family structures alter to reflect Western ideals due to the migration of employment from rural to urban areas. A significant portion of *Woubi chéri* does focus on economic survival

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<sup>288</sup> Azodo, Ada Uzoamaka and Maureen Ngozi Eke. "Preface: Geneses." In *Gender and Sexuality in African Literature and Film*. Eds. Ada Uzoamaka Azodo and Maureen Ngozi Eke. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2007: pp. xiv.

in predominantly urban landscapes. However, it does not delve into capitalism as a propagation of an individual's sexual choice. Specifically, sex work, or as Bibiche calls it, "whoring," is the predominate method of survival as opposed to "salaried work." In addition to economic survival, the argument fears the end heterosexual reproduction and thus the downfall of the family and the erasure of future generations. This argument ignores kinship formations amongst the *woubi* community in the name of privileging heterosexual family development.

Scholars of gender and sexuality, medical professionals, and "some gays and lesbians," some of whom may have been affiliated with either or both groups, formed an opposition based on "biological determinism":

The opposing viewpoint was in accord with what seemed to be the filmmaker's [*sic*] intention, namely, that homosexuality was not a matter of choice the individual made, but rather a disposition by biological determinism coupled with early socialization in dominant male surroundings in childhood, and the natural or imposed evolution of historical, political, economic, and social circumstances in the life of an individual. [...] They railed against any new suggestion that homosexuality was a result of psychiatric conditions and thus amenable to cure, and rejected the notion that homosexuality was a medically treatable psychological disorder that could even be inherited.<sup>289</sup>

This argument suggests a male-centric homosexuality. It suggests that homosexuality, at least that which is depicted in the film, is comprised equally of biological determined traits – i.e. "born this way" – "coupled with early socialization in dominant male surroundings." Whereas the former argument plays a significant role in several narratives, the latter conclusion does not exist

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<sup>289</sup> *ibid.*, pp. xiv-xv.

in the film nor do any of the subjects point to their childhood experiences as evidence for their sexualities and gender identities.

To summarize: the debate reflected two dominant methodical and analytical approaches: 1) a psychological, essentialist model whereby heterosexuality represents the biological norm and homosexuality represents a curable, psychiatric condition and 2) a model based on the mixture of social constructionist and biological determinism. The debate failed to determine "the nature of homosexuality in Africa, the identity of the homosexual in Africa, and the correlation of that identity with aspects of African culture, including sex roles, sexual division of labor, and political organization at the family and community levels."<sup>290</sup> Arguably, one film could not attest to all of these concerns considering its specific locale, its attention to one organization and the limitations behind producing a feature film.

Reading through the arguments, as per Eke and Azodo's summarizations, neither side address the film itself. Rather, each side projects their interpretations of homosexuality onto the film itself. *Woubi chéri* became a platform for each side's respective views on homosexuality in Africa and a forum to promote their theoretical conceptualizations of sexuality. What the debate reveals is how a film about specific individuals, living in a single city, in one nation on a continent of fifty-four different nations, comes to represent Africa as an entirety. *Woubi chéri* is not a film about "Africa" nor does it project knowledge about the livelihoods of all non-normative Africans.

The film opens with a conversation between two *woubis*, Mathurin and Ferdinand, about the secretive nature of the *woubi* community. Of the two, Ferdinand dominates the conversation. *Woubis* are a global phenomenon, claims Ferdinand, all of whom are capable of finding one

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<sup>290</sup> Azodo and Eke, pp. xv.

another: "Woubis have great radar. They know exactly where to find each other. Whether in Europe, America ("Or here in Adjame," interrupts Mathurin). "Ghettos or not, *Woubis* always manage to have their hideouts. They're like bats, they live hidden. They move in groups, like birds nesting in the trees. They gather bit by bit, and you don't see them till suddenly the tree is teeming with them. That's *woubis* for you." Ferdinand's bat imagery provides an astute account of the *woubi* community. *Woubis* exist everywhere. Seeing them, however, requires communal knowledge. Coordinating visibility and invisibility as a protective strategy, community members know who belongs and who does not. The rest of the film follows the basic premise of visibility, of who has access to collective knowledge, and how outsiders may respond to what is considered unnatural or, as demonstrated in one scene between Barbara and two non-*woubi* women, difficult to imagine. Ironically, interviews predominantly occur in open spaces, such as restaurants, where individuals unassociated with the *woubi* community can observe and listen.

Tensions between visibility and invisibility, however, are not fully explored in the film's larger social context. As previously noted, the film's basic premise revolves around the search for a space for an upcoming party. After the previous year's debacle during which the press learned of the gathering, took pictures of partygoers, and publically outed several members, Barbara and her organization desire a closed-off space unknown to anyone except for invited guests. The fear of being outed, then, is prevalent amongst community members. Unlike contemporary films about LGBTQ activists in Africa where interviews typically occur in private spaces, *Woubi chéri* suggests social acceptance of the *woubi* community through its frequent use of public spaces. Nevertheless, the narrative is driven by the threat of public exposure. As a result, there is an unresolved tension between public and private.

Discussions about the *woubi-can* language further dissolve the public/private binary. Barbara, "the singer, the star of Abidjan," a leading member of the community for several years, acts as a guide and interpreter.<sup>291</sup> One of Barbara's friends – a *woubi* – introduces her to Tantie, a woman whose brief appearance primes the audience for what lies ahead. Her appearance provides the necessary opening into local lexicon of *woubi-can*.<sup>292</sup> As Barbara, Tantie, and two unnamed *woubis* walk to a restaurant, they speak of other *woubis* and *youssis*. Tantie, unfamiliar with these terms, expresses her confusion. Barbara initiates her into the *woubi* community by unveiling the language (*fig. 1*). Each definition includes socio-cultural and communal context. She intersperses Western terms, such as transvestite and homosexual, throughout her definitions, but these identities are meant to highlight rather than predetermine. Furthermore, the following dialogue, along with each succeeding quoted dialogue, is taken from the film's subtitles. All of the film's subjects speak French.

Woubis are young boys who play the role of women without being transvestite.  
Boys who like men. Sitting opposite you have two woubis. I'm a transvestite. It's special. But I'm still called a woubi insofar as I'm a boy who behaves like a woman. Then there are yossis: boys who sleep with women, transvestites and homosexuals. They play the man. They're the woubis' husbands. If you say:

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<sup>291</sup> Janis Pallister comments on the film and Barbara: "Most forms of homosexuality or *woubia* are treated here, through testimonials and scenes of gay gatherings...Quite striking is the presence of the transvestites, especially 'Barbara,' who puts the 'folles' in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* quite to shame...Several participants are engaged in a militant defense of gay rights, and explain the goals of their organization, called the Ivory Coast Transvestite Association (ICTA), of which Barbara is the president...It is mainly Barbara, too, who presents the vocabulary lesson...The end of the film features a traditional Mandingan or *djémé* held in Bingerville, a suburb of Abidjan...Dressed in beautiful boubous, the *woubis* execute what are customarily women's dances before a crowd of straights and gays" (154). Pallister notes the social acceptance of *woubis* when not participating in sexual acts, a common thread among gender (and sexually?) deviant Africans (see Desai 2001).

<sup>292</sup> *Woubi-can* refers to the *woubi* community.



"Toussou Bakari"... "Toussou" means woman, like you Tantie, you're a Toussou, so you're a woman. But "Toussou Bakari" means a woman who loves women.

Barbara's friend interrupts, "Think you'll remember? That's how we'll be talking." "You," in this case, combines Tantie and the viewer. For a Western viewer, a failure to remember these terms may result in confusion regarding interpersonal and communal dynamics. This may be of concern for Western viewers since *Woubi chéri* does not focus on sexual identities per se. Barbara identifies *woubis* and *yossis*<sup>293</sup> through their gender performativity more so than their sexual preferences, although she does acknowledge with whom *yossis* sleep. As I discuss with Laurent and Jean-Jacques, a *woubi* and *yossi* couple, gender identification overtakes sexual preferences whereby each *woubis* perceive themselves as women primarily through their participating in female orientated tasks such as cooking. Although Barbara mentions biologically female sexual desire, it is not a pertinent topic in the film. Barbara also provides knowledge of interpersonal relationships and pertinent historical events in the *woubi* community. The search for a secure location for their party resulted from extensive media coverage at their previous gathering. Photographers captured and published images of several community members. Secrecy runs through several conversations, such as Ferdinand and Mathurin's opening dialogue speaks at length with several people about same-sex sexual practices and her gender identity in

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<sup>293</sup> Matthew Thomann notes the term *les branchés* as a substitute for *yossi*. He writes, "In French, the verb 'brancher' literally means 'to plug in,' and is used as slang for someone who is 'hip' or 'cool,' suggesting that someone who is branché is 'plugged in' to popular culture. In Abidjan, branchés were able to employ the word branché in public settings to connote sexually non-normative practices and/or identity, without passersby comprehending its hidden meaning." See Thomann's "The Price of Inclusion."

open, public places.<sup>294</sup> Barbara defines terms in a public setting. In this case, it is a restaurant. nevertheless, the film suggests a relative social laxity around gender/sexuality dynamics. Barbara speaks at length with several people about same-sex sexual practices and her gender identity in open, public places.<sup>295</sup> Barbara defines terms in a public setting. In this case, it is a restaurant. She speaks with two women at a restaurant about explicit sexual practices, specifically male-male sexual practices. She addresses several men in a public bar about her gender identity. Clearly, at least for Barbara, she is not overly concerned about her safety. This may, in fact, be



fig. 1 Barbara defines terms

<sup>294</sup> Public conversations about sexuality are non-existent in *Call Me Kuchu*, *God Loves Uganda*, and *Born This Way*. Many scenes in *Born This Way* are situated within dark, closed rooms with a sole light source, highlighting the necessity for secrecy and silence to protect the lives of LGBTQ Cameroonians.

<sup>295</sup> Public conversations about sexuality are non-existent in *Call Me Kuchu*, *God Loves Uganda*, and *Born This Way*. Many scenes in *Born This Way* are situated within dark, closed rooms with a sole light source, highlighting the necessity for secrecy and silence to protect the lives of LGBTQ Cameroonians.

due to her ability to pass as biologically female. Compared to other *woubis*, such as Bibiche and Tatiana, two *transvesti* prostitutes, Barbara only dresses in female attire while the other two primarily don female clothing while working. Furthermore, Barbara's directness about her gender identity results in a charged militancy, a dedication to the global spread of *woubi*-hood.

As others speak of their lives in the small community, Barbara reflects the spread of homosexuality throughout Africa. For example, one scene shows Barbara alone, leaning against a tree in the middle of the forest, singing a song in praise of her home. For her, Africa "is a strange place." She must stay in Africa, however, since it allows her "to speak my own language." Her mission is to transform heterosexual men into *yossis* through her spread of "magic powder" across the land, influencing others to partake in "*woubia*." As she speaks, the camera pans over a lush, green forest with a flowing river. As she continues her dialogue, underscoring the necessity of her "work," the image cuts to three young nude boys alongside the river. One boy bends over to put on some pants but his genitals are visible. Barbara is also near the river but never framed as close to these boys. Although the scene is intended to empower Barbara, her words and the accompanying images reinforce contemporary homophobic declarations about homosexual influence upon African youth and the potential destruction of future generations. The succeeding scene shows Barbara speaking with two biological women. Both are unnamed. Sitting at a table in a local open-air restaurant, Barbara and the women speak – rather explicitly – about anal sex and the size of penises. One woman openly accepts Barbara while the other presents questions about male same-sex sexuality. As the women speak, teenage boys work around them, opening their soda bottles and cleaning tables. One boy stands in the background behind a counter, listening to Barbara. Resistant against heteronormativity – one

women points to the naturalness of male-female sexual relations – Barbara advocates for her militancy: "The enemy is out there. I have to load my guns and fight."

The film concludes with a celebration and a conversation between Barbara and some men. Barbara provides a politically charged voice-over narration during the celebration sequence. She questions tradition as a form of maintaining social control. Rather than abide by traditional roles, she argues that in-between spaces between tradition and modernity offer opportunities for remaking "tradition" as a celebration of individualism. "Tradition is fine," states Barbara, "but you have to be in between." She recognizes her existence between tradition/modernity divide and refuses to choose either side. As Migraine-George writes, "modernization is more often equated with dehumanizing self-interest, while indigenous traditions appear as a potential vital and fluid source of change which can lead to renewed African identities."<sup>296</sup> Barbara typically wears traditional Ivorian women's clothing. On occasion, she wears a t-shirt and jeans. She directs most of her attention the sartorial performance of Ivorian femininity. Such a performance is not a critique of Ivorian womanhood; rather, she celebrates femininity through her provocative suggestion that biological sex does not determine how one must dress. She acknowledges on several occasions her biological sex while donning traditional women's clothing. This causes confusion amongst those unfamiliar with the *woubi* community or the ICTA.

The issue of binaries resonates in the film's final scene during a lengthy conversation about Barbara's gender identification. Rather than clarifying Barbara in terms of a gendered pronoun, confusion amongst the men forces one of them to explain whom exactly Barbara "is." He calls her "double-edged knife": "So Barbara, who you see here...who is sitting here as a

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<sup>296</sup> Migraine-George, pp. 53.

woman...has another side to her." Barbara interrupts and turns to a man sitting beside her: "I'm a boy like you." The man continues: "We're no scholars but we can see Barbara is a sophisticated lady." Again, Barbara intervenes, "Just tell them I'm a boy. I'm a boy." The man once again tries to summarize Barbara: "Barbara's not a woman, she's a boy." The men laugh at the mixture of pronouns and nouns. "She" is a "boy," to which Barbara agrees. One of the men expresses confusion about how he must think of Barbara to which Barbara simply states that she is a boy. No one pushes Barbara to explain who she is any further nor does Barbara delve into any intricacies. The man sitting beside her flirts with her, suggesting that questions of gender identification are not the issue. Rather, emotions and desires drive individuals. With this, the man leans over and gives Barbara a kiss on the cheek. Barbara smiles and covers over her mouth, slightly embarrassed but also welcoming of his affection. The film ends on a still of Barbara's smile.

Barbara co-mingles female pronoun with gender identification yet never verbalizes her gender identification. She repeatedly specifies that she is a boy and she does not find these linguistic distinctions confusing or incompatible. The final scene between Barbara and the group of men further complicates matters. The group, willing to understand Barbara's self-perceptions and her position in society, presents a hopeful future for Côte d'Ivoire. Occupying an in-between position allows for fluidity and rejects strict binaries. This final scene undoes "traditional" methods of categorization and explanation. Generally speaking, "African cultures also had ways to explain and accommodate those men and women who did not fit the social ideal. These included a wide range of spirit possessions, most commonly, a male ancestor inhabiting a living female person, and vice versa. A person so possessed could hardly affront the spirit by having

sexual relations with a living person of the same sex as the spirit."<sup>297</sup> None of the men propose this reading – whether one did remains unknown due to the editing process – as they accept Barbara as a "she" who is a "boy." Earlier in the film, while breaking down the *woubi* vocabulary, Barbara refers to herself as a boy: "I am a transvestite. It's special. But I am still called a woubi in so far as I'm a boy who behaves like a woman." Her mixture of overlapping terms denies singularity; she exists in-between words, in-between ideas. This in-between space, as Homi Bhabha suggests, constitutes as the "terrain for elaborate strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation."<sup>298</sup>

Barbara celebratory transformation from boy to woman swirls with the spirit of the artist.



*fig. 2* Barbara sings by the river

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<sup>297</sup> Epprecht, Marc. "'Hidden' Histories of African Homosexualities." *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol. 24, nos. 2/3, Winter/Spring 2000, pp. 139.

<sup>298</sup> Bhabha, Homi. *Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994, pp. 1-2.

For the artist perpetually creates and reimagines the world, and, as Barbara proclaims, "You have to be creative, live life like an artist." Viewers become privy to such physical recreation towards the film's conclusion as Barbara prepares her dress for the party. Her singing beside the river provides a more standardized version of the artist. In the "third millennium" Barbara declares, there will be a "mix of modern and traditional, different ways of life and sex." Artists lead the way, breaking down boundaries and existing within realms heretofore unimagined. Living in-between tradition and modernity produce "transformative creative acts of identity construction."<sup>299</sup> Ideologically, Barbara's pronouncements about the *woubi* community identify her transformative ideals and visions of the future. Her song points towards the spread of knowledge about *woubis* throughout the nation and all of Africa. Her imaginative invocation of a "magic powder" grants viewers a look into Barbara's spirit (*fig. 2*). Barbara's militaristic rhetoric espoused in a public restaurant encapsulates the battles between the *woubi* community and society. Speaking with two women, one of whom appears reticent about Barbara's sexuality and gender, Barbara provides a passionate retort against her "enemies":

I want people to known and understand who I am. So they can either take me or leave me....If I was hung up about it, you'd be more hung up about me. If I behave freely, you'll feel free with me. You may not understand but you'll be relaxed, and you're here with me....I was aware very young of what I was and wanted to be, and how. I often think of those I don't know as the opposing community. I get into battle gear and I'm ready for you....The enemy is out there, I have to load my guns and fight.

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<sup>299</sup> Eke, pp. 244.

Barbara's rhetoric, however, is not intended to provoke violence. Much like the film, Barbara convinces others via "peaceful conversation," similar to the scene itself. The wary woman asks Barbara about sex to which Barbara denounces the woman's proclamation that vaginal sex is "natural" and in accordance with God's plans. Barbara responds, "*Controus* [straight] talk! It's [anal sex] natural too. It's been planned that way." Rather than denounce biological determinism, Barbara exploits the same argument. With patience and joviality, Barbara answers all of the woman's questions with hopes that the conversation produces positivity and interconnectivity between heretofore "opposing" communities.

Barbara's visual and societal affiliation with women is the result of performative dissonance amongst the group of men. In her article "Critically Queer," Judith Butler addresses modes of laying claim to oneself through self-naming. Barbara consistently labels herself *travesti*, but when it comes to gender pronouns, she acknowledges herself to be a "boy." Barbara's identification as *travesti* includes specific associations: she is anatomically male yet cognitively and socio-culturally identifies as female. Others recognize this distinction. Yet, amongst the clearly confused men – even the man who tries to explain to his friends "who" Barbara "is" cannot fully articulate these distinctions – she must be *both* anatomically and socio-culturally female. Barbara successfully performs femininity to the extent that the men have a difficult time comprehending her anatomical maleness. A "successful" performance, argues Judith Butler, "is not because an intention successfully governs the action of speech, but only because that action echoes a prior action, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices*."<sup>300</sup> Barbara successful

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<sup>300</sup> Butler, Judith. "Critically Queer." *GLQ*, vol. 1, no. 1, January 1993, pp. 19.



performativity of femininity leaves the men to think of her as a "double-edged knife." The metaphor falters, however, resulting in Barbara's declaration that she is a "boy."

Although Barbara opens and closes the film and provides narrative structure, other community members provide depth and complexity about socio-cultural perceptions of gender and sexuality. *Yossi* men, the most prominent being Jean-Jacques, construct gender and sexual identification in relation to their *woubi* partner. For Jean-Jacques, that is Laurent. Jean-Jacques and Laurent represent the *woubi/yossi* couple where Jean-Jacques occupies the masculine/husband role and Laurent the feminine/wife position. Jean-Jacques describes his initial attraction towards Laurent as Laurent sits beside him. "What impressed me about Laurent was his sense of respect," Jean-Jacques states. "No matter what, we were born men. We have to assert that." Laurent interjects and undermines Jean-Jacques biological declaration: "And I feel like a woman." Biology and genitalia occupy different realms of being for Laurent and Jean-Jacques. "I mean, we all have our vices," Jean-Jacques vaguely acknowledges. Jean-Jacques privileges maleness/masculinity. He anecdotally explains Laurent's feminine characteristics: "If I take Laurent to a little family gathering in my village people will look at us both...He uses all kinds of cosmetics on his face...That does me no honour." Jean-Jacques perceives Laurent as a man; therefore Laurent should not apply cosmetics around his family. Laurent's application of cosmetics, according to Jean-Jacques, defies his masculinity. Laurent's public display of femininity has not resulted in Jean-Jacques' loss of honor. "I'm still respected by my family," Jean-Jacques declares, suggesting Laurent's feminine displays regardless of his anatomical maleness comply with socio-cultural norms about gendered relationships.

Laurent's *feelings* of womanhood oppose his biological assignment. This does not prevent Jean-Jacques from expressing his desire to marry Laurent and take him as his wife. In an earlier

scene, Laurent describes his childhood, how he dropped out of school, and his father's intentions for him to become a mechanic. Working in a garage, with the oil, dirt, and filth is a man's job, declares Laurent, and he refused the offer. He would rather become a hairdresser, a form of employment typically associated with same-sex loving men throughout Africa.<sup>301</sup> Thus, Laurent's battle for self-preservation is built upon resistance to patriarchy as represented by his father. Furthermore, Laurent cooks for himself and Jean-Jacques, as well as his family. What Laurent looks like, his choice in cosmetics, and his forms of dress do not constitute the only means of gender signification. His form of employment and his role in the household dictate equally his gender assignment. Even with these socio-cultural gender roles in place, he reaffirms the culturally dictated responsibility of heterosexual reproduction: "Right now, I'm not ready to sleep with a woman and have children. I don't even dream of it." As long as Laurent reproduces future generations, then his sexuality is not a significant issue. Two aspects augment his statement: 1) Jean-Jacques must stress his gender and his masculinity in opposition to *woubi* femininity and 2) he recognizes the global reach of film. The first statement underpins the film's narrative tension as Barbara later admonishes current *yossi* for their failure to remain monogamous with their *woubi*. The second reflects his self-awareness concerning cinematic representation and how viewers may interpret his sexuality.

Laurent's remarks deconstruct heteronormativity through the promotion of femininity without a biologically female body. A reversal of J. Jack Halberstam's female masculinity whereby gender identification replaces biological physicality thus disconnecting masculinity from the male body, Laurent refuses his physically gendered body. Unlike the Western

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<sup>301</sup> See Graeme Reid's *How to Be a Real Gay* for South African perspectives on male hairdressers and forms of employment as indicative of sexuality. Also see Tendai Huchu's novel *The Hairdresser of Harare* for a fictionalized account.

hegemonic binary male/female, Laurent and Jean-Jacques conceptualize gender identity with social roles. Over the course of the scene, the unnamed *yossi* who appears slightly intoxicated – a full beer rests by his side – narrates how his older brother's friend, who happened to be a *woubi*, seduced him in the middle of the night. The *woubi* approached him while he was sleeping and slowly moved his hands upward from the man's feet to his groin. Although the *yossi* man views the *woubi* as his brother's male friend, he rectifies his experience by reframing the *woubi*'s gender. Perception is everything since *yossis* maintain relationships and sleep with *woubis* by comprehending them as female.

Bibiche's and Tatiana's stories of sex work show a starkly different reality as compared with Laurent and Jean-Jacques relationship narrative and Barbara's effusive artistic performativity. Economic and physical survival casts a shadow over Bibiche's life. Over the course the interview, close-ups on Bibiche's face detail an unhealthy individual and posit questions about HIV/AIDS in the *woubi* community. As of 2016 and in Abidjan alone, roughly 18% of men who have sex with men are HIV positive.<sup>302</sup> It is unknown as to whether or not Bibiche or Tatiana is HIV-positive – the film is dedicated to Tatiana but there is no explanation as to why – but the physical effects of sex work show upon their faces. In not speaking about health issues and sexual protection, the film fails to address real concerns amongst non-heterosexual Africans. Furthermore, as the film's opening sequence demonstrates, *woubis* are a global force, and in ignoring health risks and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the film fails to account for pertinent, everyday trials for many LGBTQ individuals. Dark circles surrounds her eyes, sweat drips down their face, her cheeks cling tightly inwards. Regardless of her physical appearance, she resists sympathy and exudes defiance. "I thought I'd make a few bucks whoring

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<sup>302</sup> Thomann, Matthew. "Zones of Difference, Boundaries of Access: Moral Geography and Community Mapping in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire." *Journal of Homosexuality* 63.3 (2016): 426.

and that's what I did. I have my own furnished place thanks to whoring...I say, thank God for whoring!" (*Fig. 3*). Unlike Laurent's wishes for a wedding ring and financial stability, she celebrates her economic independence through prostitution and refusal of normative modes of survival, such as financial dependency from a husband. The scene cuts to Tatiana, another prostitute, dressed in a long black dress with a white t-shirt underneath and a dark, black wig, on a streetlight brightened avenue, searching for potential customers. A few cars pass – one takes a loop around Tatiana and her companion but decides otherwise, perhaps thrown off by the adjacent camera – but the night is fruitless. As cars pass, she poses provocatively, hands in her hair, alluring, billowing each strand. For another car will pass and another attempt will be made for their survival depends upon it.

*Woubi chéri* moves towards social acceptance and gatherings openly celebrating non-conforming gender and sexual identities. The film's penultimate scene features members of the ICTA in an enclosed compound, wearing traditional women's attire and dancing to live musicians. Thérèse Migraine-George describes this intimate gathering as "festive image of a (non-)traditional celebration for which a varied community of families and couples has gathered: a community made of many transgressive differences but also of renewed and strengthened social relations."<sup>303</sup> The gathering is open to families and children. For all their concerns about secrecy, a significant amount of people supports the community. The celebration begins mid-day as Barbara and her fellow ICTA members dance and create a circle. They don shiny blue shawls and similarly colored headpieces. They laugh and cheer to a singer and drummers. The scene shows other members eating, drinking, and, after nightfall, lighting fireworks.

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<sup>303</sup> Migraine-George, pp. 55.

Nevertheless, everyone expresses reservations concerning their physical, emotional, and financial survival. Tatiana suggests that *woubis* are an "endangered species," reframing Mathurin and Ferdinand's earlier comments about *woubis* as bats. She continues: "It's not easy for us to go out in the daytime. They throw stones at us. It's not easy for us here in Africa." Tatiana's remarks collide with Barbara's almost idealistic statements about Africa. Yet even Barbara acknowledges her personal tribulations and feelings of isolation: "You feel alone, and you don't dare tell anyone. You've no one like you to turn to. No *yossis* who might reassure you...You think of the scandal it might cause and all that." Jean-Jacques, too, acknowledges his family and community's disapproval towards Laurent's socially improper masculinity, to which he proclaims, "That doesn't do me no honor." Even in supposedly committed *yossi/woubi* relationships, communal responses to the relationship, particularly to the *woubi*, highlight socio-cultural issues. Unfortunately, the film does not explore these issues in detail.

Bibiche and Tatiana's fears of publicity showcase different socio-cultural attitudes towards homosexuality. This may be, in part, due to their failure to pass as "authentically" feminine or due to their professions. Unlike Barbara's interviews, Bibiche and Tatiana address the camera in private settings, such as a closed vehicle or their homes. The necessity for privacy during daylight hours is for personal protection. Unlike Barbara, whose successful passing for a woman confuses those who cannot fathom her *not* a biological woman, Bibiche and Tatiana are repeatedly shown remaking themselves: applying lipstick, adjusting a wig, and smoothing out clothing. Barbara is seen once getting ready for the day; yet she is never seen worrying about her appearance in public for she knows she successfully passes as a woman. Even as a viewer, it is difficult to parse Barbara's gender, thus subverting distinctions between gender and sexuality.



*fig. 3 Bibiche close-up*

Barbara does not speak of herself as "she" or does she admonish anyone who speaks of her using feminine pronouns. Her identification as a "boy" further complicates how others are meant to see her. Bibiche and Tatiana, on the other hand, recognize gender performativity as a necessity for economic survival. In their cases, gender and sexuality coalesce for reasons beyond individualism.

### *Conclusion*

*Woubi chéri* signaled the beginning of what may tentatively called "Queer African Cinema." Unlike its successors, *Woubi chéri* addresses gender and sexuality in Abidjan and the socio-cultural make-up of a localized queer community. Although it does not delve into national or continental concerns about homosexuality, *Woubi chéri* celebrates the art of individual communication. Furthermore, cinematic expressions of same-sex sexuality break away from

what may be deemed "traditional" so as to formulate alternative modes of cultural expression. This does not suggest that these new models represent a "modern" perspective; rather, these works, intentionally blur efforts to distinguish between modern and traditional identities as well as complicate how traditional cultural practices may evolve, change, and/or disappear over time.

CHAPTER FOUR: Sexuality and Religion in Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Trees* and  
Diriye Osman's *Fairytales for Lost Children*

Contemporary African authors from the continent and throughout the diaspora have written queer subjects "into new prominence and legibility."<sup>304</sup> Queer figures occupy interstitial territories: capable of demarcating socio-cultural boundaries of where and where not queerness may be enacted; of protesting and subverting various forms of heterosexist oppression; and of imaging different forms of resistance which do not always align with anti/post-colonial movements. Of late, authors have composed explicitly queer identified characters within varying historical, geographic, and socio-cultural contexts. In her debut novel *Under the Udala Trees*, Nigerian-American author Chinelo Okparanta situates female queer growth alongside Nigeria's fractured social development from the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) to President Goodluck Jonathan's signing of the "Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill, 2013." Okparanta explores homegrown queerness from childhood to adulthood and counters the narrative of homosexuality as a foreign importation. Somali-British author Diriye Osman's debut collection of short stories, *Fairytales for Lost Children*, stretches tales of queer hardship, kinship, love and loss across the Somali diaspora from Somalia to Kenya and Britain. Okparanta and Osman centralize queer narratives and imagine new and different methods of non-normative African resistance against calls for authenticity. The ever-present threat of violence, however, never vanishes, as it repeatedly requires alternative strategies of survival.

One key strategic survival tool is religion. Okparanta and Osman's narrative reflect Marc Epprecht's observation that "many African lgbti [*sic*]...are proudly, happily and deeply

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<sup>304</sup> Munro, Brenna. "Locating 'Queer' in Contemporary Writing of War and Love in Nigeria." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 47, no. 2, Summer 2016, pp. 121.



religious."<sup>305</sup> Adriaan van Klinken confirms Epprecht's argument. Yet he observes that the declaration of "religious commitment" may be "considered a contradiction" that "conflict[s] with sexual identity."<sup>306</sup> *Under the Udala Trees* and *Fairytales for Lost Children* navigate the conflicts between organized religion, specifically Christianity and Islam, and sexuality. These works also point to religion as a source of personal strength and guidance amongst queer African's. Both texts evaluate how faith can bridge historically unbridgeable gaps between pro- and anti-LGBTQ crowds. Additionally, Okparanta and Osman provide well-balanced accounts of the socio-cultural functionality of Christianity and Islam, respectively, as sites of homophobic rhetoric and personal liberation from oppression.

This chapter is split into two distinct sections between Okparanta's novel and Osman's short stories. Both sections contextualize socio-cultural backgrounds about queer lives in each author's respective geographical and cultural arena. Okparanta's novel originated from state-sponsored oppression and the extensive outreach of homophobic rhetoric amongst different ethnic groups within Nigeria's borders. I draw attention to recent histories on Nigerian opposition of homosexuality, the central government's support of Sharia penal codes in northern Nigeria, and the passing of the "Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill 2013." On the other hand, Osman's diasporic expansiveness does not allow for a cohesive unification based on geographic location, although it is mentioned in part. He draws attention to the relationship between Islam and Somali heritage since Osman intertwines sexuality with religion and sets many tales during Islamic holidays. LGBTQ rights in Somalia or amongst Somalis have not garnered significant attention amongst scholars thereby making any substantial research on queer Somali identities difficult to

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<sup>305</sup> Epprecht, Marc. *Sexuality and Social Justice in Africa*. Zed Books, 2013, pp. 66.

<sup>306</sup> Klinken, Adriaan van. "Queer Love in a 'Christian Nation': Zambian Gay Men Negotiation Sexual and Religious Identities." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 83, no. 4, December 2015, pp. 949.

conduct. However, unlike Nigerians, Somalis consider themselves a unified ethnic group. Osman locates critiques of homophobic attitudes within Somali culture as opposed to state-sponsored homophobia. His stories, then, reveal queer identities commonly ignored amongst Somalis as well as those invested in Queer African Studies.

### *Under the Udala Trees*

The title of this chapter originates from an early scene in Okparanta's novel. Ijeoma, the novel's young female protagonist, was recently discovered in a compromised, intimate position with her female friend, Amina. Ijeoma's mother, Adaora, a deeply conservative Christian, tries to instill Biblical moral teachings about the sinful abomination that is homosexuality. During one session, her mother interprets of the story of Lot as a tale against the atrocities of homosexuality. Ijeoma wonders whether the tale is more so concerned with hospitality than homosexuality. Adaora refuses Ijeoma's reading and comments that there is only one proper interpretation. Ijeoma's questioning of both her mother's interpretation of Biblical doctrine becomes a common theme throughout the novel as she, a faithful yet disenchanted Christian, proffers several alternative readings. Rather than view Christianity as static, incapable of change, she envisions the word of God as in flux, constantly being written anew. The duality between open interpretation and closed doctrine becomes the overarching thematic of *Under the Udala Trees* and is best exemplified in this early conversation between mother and daughter:

"Everybody knows what lesson we should take from that story. Man must not lie with man, and if man does, man will be destroyed. Which is why God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah."

"It couldn't have been because they were selfish and inhospitable and violent?" I asked. "It has to be that other thing?"

"Yes," Mama said. "It had to be that other thing. It couldn't have been anything other than that other thing."<sup>307</sup>

The phrase "that other thing" shies away from understanding homosexuality beyond its Biblical representations. Homosexuality will always remain on the side of deviancy, something to be feared and condemned outright for its moral and spiritual failures. It is something that cannot be spoken of; it becomes "that other thing." As Evan Mwangi notes, "In most African societies homosexuality is a practice without a name."<sup>308</sup> In this respect, Okparanta frames her novel about homosexuality without writing "homosexuality" or "lesbian," except for in the final pages. Sexual identities are never addressed specifically nor is the notion of anything beyond heterosexuality accepted as possible. Ijeoma feels out her sexuality out through trial and error. Nevertheless, she reconciles her sexuality through her faith and concludes that her Christianity is not at odds with her sexuality regardless of her mother's indoctrination of Biblically ordained homophobia.

Anti-homosexuality sentiment has permeated Nigerian society for decades prior to enactment of the "Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013." On 22 April 1990, Major Gideon Gwaza Orkar along with several dozen soldiers staged a coup d'état against the Ibrahim Babangida government. Immediately after the coup, Orkar addressed the Nigerian populace. He opened his speech as follows: "On behalf of the patriotic and well-meaning peoples of the Middle Belt and the southern parts of this country, I, Major Gideon Orkar, wish to happily

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<sup>307</sup> Okparanta, Chinelo. *Under the Udala Trees*. Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015: 74.

<sup>308</sup> Mwangi, Evan. *Africa Writes Back to Self*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009: 189.

inform you of the successful ousting of the dictatorial, corrupt, drug baronish, evil man, deceitful, homosexually-centered, prodigalistic, unpatriotic administration of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babandiga." Public discussions of homosexuality elaborated upon its negative connotations, its affiliations with social deviancy and unacceptable morality. Homosexuality represented social decay and "surfaced as signs of crisis."<sup>309</sup> Orkar conflates homosexuality with moral deviancy and financial excess, making it incompatible with a thriving nation-state. Nevertheless, Orkar's coup was quickly dismantled. Forty-one coup conspirators connected with the coup, including Orkar, were found guilty of treason and executed. Orkar's coup is one of many Nigeria's coups and has been lost in the nation's tumultuous political history. His disparaging remarks about homosexuality, however, underscore the power laden behind homophobic commentary years prior to contemporary issues about LGBTQ rights.

It was not until the mid-2000s that governmental bodies began to identify homosexuality as a punishable offense. In September 2006, United Nations Ambassador and Representative of Nigeria Joseph U. Ayalogu addressed the U.N. Human Rights Council to clarify rumored practices of stoning throughout northern Nigeria as a form of punishment for what he called "unnatural sexual acts." Northern Nigerian states impose Sharia law, Ayalogu noted, with the support of the Nigerian state, and, while stoning is a socially acceptable form of punishment, "the practice of death by stoning is not pervasive."<sup>310</sup> A 2011 United States Country Report on Nigeria confirmed Ayalogu's comments.<sup>311</sup> He outlined the Nigerian government's moratorium

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<sup>309</sup> Qtd. in Osinubi, Taiwo Adetunji. "Queer Prolepsis and the Sexual Commons: An Introduction." *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 47, no. 2, Summer 2016, pp. x.

<sup>310</sup> Steiner, Henry J., et al. *International Human Rights in Context: Law, Politics, Morals*. Oxford UP, 2008, pp. 781. Under *shari'ah* law in northern Nigeria, male homosexuality may be punished with stoning and female homosexuality may be punished with up to fifty lashes and six months imprisonment. See "A well-locked closet."

<sup>311</sup> "Nigeria." *United States Department of State*. 24 May 2012.

on the death penalty and how Sharia law cannot legally enforce the death penalty without Nigerian government oversight.<sup>312</sup> Although he tempered international concerns about uninhibited punishment for homosexuality, he concluded his statement with an ambiguous response about cultural subjectivity to homosexuality: "Also, the notion that executions for offences such as homosexuality and lesbianism are excessive is judgemental [*sic*] rather than objective. What may be seen by some as a disproportional penalty in such serious offences and odious conduct such may be seen by others as appropriate and just punishment." While not explicitly promoting punishments against homosexuality, Ayalogu reiterates the incompatibility of homosexuality with African cultures and approves of any legally sanctioned form of punishment regardless of the perceptions of other governmental institutions. Homosexuality must be punished for it constitutes as an "odious" offence; the method of punishment, however, is dependent upon judicial processes.

Judicial decisions, however, are not always accepted by society. In early January 2014 in the northern state of Bauchi, only a month after President Goodluck Jonathan signed into law a bill criminalizing homosexuality, twelve men were accused of homosexual behavior. As the

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<sup>312</sup> Which is not to suggest that northern states do not enforce and regulate sexual practices. In the northern state of Kano, the government employs the "Hisbah," a para-security organization "set up to police and enforce the Islamic law." According to Ebenezer Obadare, one of the "Hisbah's advertised duties is the enforcement of sexual compliance." Obadare's brief mentioning of Hisbah does not adequately explore the history of *sharī'ah* law in Nigeria and its importance within postcolonial northern Nigeria, especially within Kano. Rasheed Oyewole Olaniyi accounts the popularity of *sharī'ah* in Kano:

In Kano, the zeal to maintain Sharia [*sic*] to its full extent was equally driven by aggressive Christian evangelization, proliferation of churches, and the violent aftermath since the 1990s. It marked a way to resist Western modernity and the soaring number of sex workers, whose lifestyles were incompatible with attributes of Islamic religion and Hausa cultural ethos. Also, popular support for Sharia was motivated by general disenchantment with deteriorating social conditions and ineffective policing. The Nigerian police remain alien to people in terms of protection of lives and property: the police are equally militarized, and security operatives with criminal background forced their way into the police. (78)

twelve accused entered the courtroom, a crowd of men surrounded them, raining bottles and rocks upon them. One participant, Umar Inuwa Obi, summarized crowd's feelings: "God has not allowed this thing; we are not animals."<sup>313</sup> Adam Nossiter, writing for the *New York Times*, recalls witnesses who "wanted to set the courtroom ablaze."<sup>314</sup> All except one of the accused – a lone Christian who was tried in secular court – were tried under Sharia law.<sup>315</sup> Mohammed Tata, a senior official with the northern states' *shari'ah* commission declared homosexuality to be "an abomination." One of the accused, Mubarak Ibrahim, was punished with a whipping of "20 strokes."<sup>316</sup> Crowds, disappointed at the court's leniency, called for Ibrahim's death by stoning. The presiding judge, Nuhu Idris Mohammed, "praised his own leniency" when he stated that Ibrahim "'is supposed to be killed."<sup>317</sup> His failure to enact the will of the people culminated with his fleeing to his chambers. In a separate incident in Nigeria's capital Abuja, a mob of roughly fifty men beat at least fourteen presumably gay men. Four of the victims were dragged out of their homes, taken to a local police station, and received additional beatings by the police. According to a different report submitted by Nossiter, "witnesses and activists said some in the mob were shouting, 'We Are working for Jonathan!'"<sup>318</sup> Evidently, the "Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013" resulted in extrajudicial justice as Nigerian people took the law into their hands.

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<sup>313</sup> Nossiter, Adam. "Nigeria Tries to 'Sanitize' Itself of Gays." *New York Times* 8 February 2014. Web. 10 February 2016.

<sup>314</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> "Nigeria Islamic court tried gay suspects in Bauchi." *BBC*. 15 January 2014. 10 February 2016.

<sup>316</sup> "Bauchi Sharia court carries out first punishment under Nigeria's new anti-gay laws." *Nigerian Watch*. 18 January 2014. 10 February 2016.

<sup>317</sup> Nossiter, Adam. "Nigeria Tries to 'Sanitize' Itself of Gays." *New York Times*. 8 February 2014.

<sup>318</sup> Nossiter, Adam. "Mob Attacks More Than a Dozen Gay Men in Nigeria's Capital." *New York Times*. 15 February 2014.

What eventually became the "Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013" was introduced by Justice Minister Bayo Ojo of Kogi state in central Nigeria in 2006 under the slightly altered title "Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, 2006." The bill proposed the criminalization of same-sex marriages and included a five-year prison sentence for anyone convicted of aiding a same-sex couple in marriage ceremony or for anyone who advocated for LGBTQ rights. The legislation passed the cabinet of Nigeria, but it failed to pass the National Assembly. The bill was later reintroduced in 2007 and adopted by the Federal Ministries of Nigeria, a bureaucratic amalgamation of various governmental entities such as defense and finance ministries, and was readmitted before the National Assembly. Outside international human rights organizations condemned the legislation. Due to unfavorable international pressures, the bill again failed to pass. The following year saw the introduction of the "Same Gender (Prohibition) Act 2008." Comparatively, the "Same Gender (Prohibition) Act 2008" proposed more lenient punishments, albeit punishments all the same, on couples who enter into a same-sex marriage. If tried and convicted, couples may have received up to three years imprisonment. Like its predecessor, the bill was tabled after it failed to gain traction. In May 2011, the bill again resurfaced. The "Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill 2011" underwent three readings in the National Assembly of Nigeria. On Tuesday, 29 November 2011, the bill was read for a final time and was passed on the same date. Once signed into law, the bill would outlaw same-sex marriage and civil union and officially recognize marriage as solely between a man and a woman. Furthermore, it would prohibit "gay clubs, societies and organisation" and "public show of same sex amorous relationship directly or indirectly." Any "persons who entered into a same sex marriage contract or civil union" faced up to fourteen years imprisonment. "Any person who registers, operates or participates in gay clubs, societies, organisation, or directly or indirectly make public show of

same sex relationship" faced up to ten years, as did any witnesses or supporters of a same-sex marriage, civil union and/or gay organization.<sup>319</sup> Two years later, on 2 July 2013, the bill passed the House of Representatives under the slightly revised name "Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill 2013." After the establishment of a committee intended to clarify some minor points, then President Goodluck Jonathan signed the bill into law on 13 January 2014.<sup>320</sup>

The U.K. based LGBTQ human rights and charity organization Kaleidoscope Trust noted that the bill received "muted" international attention. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry called it a "dangerous" restriction on freedoms. Canadian Affairs Minister John Baird condemned the legislation.<sup>321</sup> In October 2011, one month before the bill's passage, British Prime Minister David Cameron expressed concerns over legislation across the African continent regarding the punishment of homosexuality. At the time, other African nations such as Uganda were also working towards the criminalization of same-sex sexuality. With Uganda and Nigeria being two former British colonial holdings, Cameron reflected on Britain's historical relationship with the two nations and mulled over the retraction of monetary aid. Cameron declared that "[t]his is an issue where we are pushing for movement, we are prepared to put some money behind what we believe. But I'm afraid that you can't expect countries to change overnight....Britain is one the premier aid givers in the world. We want to see countries receive our aid adhering to proper human rights."<sup>322</sup> In response to Cameron's proposal, then President of the Senate of Nigeria

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<sup>319</sup> Jonah Fisher, a reporter for the BBC, wrote that during the third reading, "one northern politician said he believed the punishment should be death." ("Nigerian Leaders Unite")

<sup>320</sup> News reports typically use two dates in discussion of the legislation: 7 January 2014 and 13 January 2014. For clarification's sake, president Jonathan signed the legislation on 7 January. On the 13 January, the law went into effect. 13 January, as I shall discuss later on, is the date upon which *Under the Udala Trees*' epilogue occurs.

<sup>321</sup> "John Baird slams Nigeria over anti-gay bill." *CBC*, 30 November 2011.

<sup>322</sup> "Cameron threat to dock some UK aid to anti-gay nations." *BBC* 30 Oct. 2011. Web. 2 Dec. 2015.



David Mark declared, "If there is any country that does not want to give us aid on account of this, it should keep its aid."<sup>323</sup> As of writing, Britain continues to grant aid to Nigeria, rendering Cameron's remarks, as well as Kerry's and Baird's, nothing but empty political rhetoric.<sup>324</sup>

Nigeria's now decade long infatuation with the criminalization of homosexuality influenced Chinelo Okparanta during the composition of her debut novel *Under the Udala Trees*. Indeed, Okparanta includes an "Author's Note" at the novel's conclusion which verifies Nigeria's downward course when it comes to the protecting of LGBTQ rights. The note reads:

On January 7, 2014, Nigeria's president, Goodluck Jonathan, signed into law a bill criminalizing same-sex relationships and the support of such relationships, making these offenses punishable by up to fourteen years in prison. In the northern states, the punishment is death by stoning. This novel attempts to give Nigeria's marginalized LGBTQ citizens a more powerful voice, and a place in our nation's history.<sup>325</sup>

The weak rhetoric of Western nations and their condemnation of Nigeria's legislation required new voices to reject the "Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Bill 2013" and its legally advocated witch-hunt. Okparanta's novel accomplishes the task of providing "Nigeria's marginalized LGBTQ citizens a more powerful voice, and a place in our nation's history" as she imagines Ijeoma's narrative in congruence with Nigeria's history. Ijeoma's story is Nigeria's story, as she faces internal and external pressures to be somebody who she is not. Rather than wholeheartedly reject her upbringing and her faith, Ijeoma envisions new and different ways to be both Nigerian

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<sup>323</sup> Fisher, Jonah. "Nigerian leaders unite against same-sex marriages." *BBC* 5 Dec. 2011.

<sup>324</sup> Goodluck Jonathan's successor, former military strongman Muhammadu Buhari, confirmed Nigeria's commitment to the anti-gay legislation From 7 December 1983 to 27 August 1985, Buhari was military head of state after a successful *coup d'état*. He participated in several coups prior to taking office, specifically the 28 July 1966 counter-coup and the July 1975 coup.

<sup>325</sup> Okparanta, pp. 325.

and Christian. Furthermore, Ijeoma's story is not the only queer Nigerian woman's story. She meets several women over the course of her life that face daily threats of emotional, physical, and spiritual violence. Although *Under the Udala Trees* focuses primarily on Ijeoma, her narrative exists within a web of intertwining queer narratives.

Okparanta provides a counternarrative to official Nigerian history and reintroduces queer Nigerians into living memory. Her radical re-membering of female same-sex sexualities and lesbian partnerships undercuts government legal doctrine that refuses to acknowledge histories of female intimacies and socially designated female-husbands. She begins the process of re-membering at the Nigerian Civil War. Even after the official civil war ends, she imagines its extension beyond its temporal boundaries: Nigerian society continues to be torn asunder by its criminalization of same-sex marriage. Causalities climb daily, but hopes for a better, more inclusive future never fade. Ijeoma's narrative centralizes religious influences and its multiple attempts to prevent and destroy the existence of homosexuality. As she matures and experiences the realities of homophobic violence beyond her mother's teachings, she discovers a Nigeria that constantly looks towards the past and remains blind to the future. Ijeoma, too, narrates her past from a present perspective. And yet, her remembrances conclude with visions of a new Nigeria, a Nigeria open to different sexualities and genders.

After the death of her father in a bombing raid, Ijeoma's mother, Adaora, distraught and incapable of emotionally and financially caring for her daughter, sends Ijeoma off to a neighboring town to live with a family friend, a local schoolteacher and his wife. She becomes their servant in return for food and housing. During this time, Ijeoma meets Amina, a young Hausa girl who lost her family in the war. The schoolteacher, initially displeased with Ijeoma and Amina's relationship due to Igbo/Hausa tensions, allows Amina to stay in his homestead also

as a servant. Over time, Ijeoma and Amina develop a close-knit friendship that evolves into an intimate relationship. The schoolteacher accidentally discovers their relationship, which results in Ijeoma's return to her mother. Fearful of her daughter's un-Christian ways, Adaora teaches Ijeoma Biblical scripture about the unsanctified nature of homosexuality. After a year of her mother's teachings, Ijeoma leaves to attend an all-female boarding school that Amina also attends. The two quickly reignite their relationship. However, Adima gradually becomes distant due to her own yearlong Biblical indoctrination and rejects Ijeoma. As their years-long tenure at the school comes to a close, Amina informs Ijeoma of her impending nuptials with an unnamed man. Ijeoma becomes distraught over Amina's marriage and returns home to work in her mother's grocery store. During this time, she meets Ndidi, a secondary school teacher. A romance blossoms between them. Ijeoma, however, feels guilt: guilt in forgetting Adima and guilt for deviating from Biblical scripture. Ndidi and Ijeoma develop a close relationship and, after time, Ndidi introduces Ijeoma to the local lesbian community. After a tragic fire and violent death of one of the community members, Ndidi and Ijeoma separate yet do not cut off communication. During this time, Ijeoma's childhood friend Chibundu begins to visit her every day. Adaora eventually convinces Ijeoma to go on a date with Chibundu. The relationship quickly evolves into marriage, albeit reluctantly on Ijeoma's part. She continues to communicate with Ndidi via courier mail that Chibundu eventually discovers. After years of maintaining false appearances and struggling with her faith, Ijeoma, with her infant daughter, Chidinma, swaddled against her body, abandons Chibundu and leaves for her mother's house. The novel concludes years later on 13 January 2014 as Ijeoma recounts the changes in her mother towards homosexuality, her newfound relationship with Ndidi, and their hopes for the future.

Told in a non-linear fashion, or, to use Carol Anshaw's phrase, a "looping reminiscence," Ijeoma provides memories of her childhood, the loss of her father, her first relationship with a girl named Amina, her mother's incessant Biblical teachings, and her failed heterosexual marriage. Ijeoma speaks from the present as she remembers adolescent experiences – their romantic heights and tragic lows – and her transition into adulthood, especially her marriage with a childhood friend, Chibundu, and the birth of her daughter. Anshaw's phrase is especially poignant for Ijeoma mentions events in her past without fully explicating their importance. Not until those memories return in temporal sequence with the overall narrative does she reveal specificities. She stitches her memories together to understand how she survived within a homophobic society. For example, Ijeoma rehashes her Biblical teachings prior to explaining why she is being taught to fear and disparage homosexuality. In the first pages, Ijeoma outlines why she is telling her story and the linear progression of events: "There is no way to tell the story of Amina without first telling the story of Mama's sending me off. Likewise, there is no way to tell the story of Mama's sending me off without also telling of Papa's refusal to go to the bunker. Without his refusal, the sending away might never have occurred, and if the sending away had not occurred, then I might never have met Amina."<sup>326</sup> No story is complete without understanding what came prior; these events form a unified narrative of Ijeoma's queer development. Although she unveils the narrative's linear progression, Ijeoma skips from memory to memory, especially during the novel's early sections. With time, Ijeoma opens memories to further examination, the majority of which are cast in shame and guilt. Ijeoma pieces together fragmented, yet interconnected, memories that embellish the difficult emotional process of remembering. For her stories are of death, loss, and shame. Not until the present day can she

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<sup>326</sup> Okparanta, pp. 4.

imagine a hopeful future for herself and fellow queer Nigerians; however, her hopefulness stands upon narratives of personal isolation.

As a practicing Christian in her adult years – she never specifies her denomination – Ijeoma grapples with how her sexuality deviates from Biblical teachings. Or, more specifically, her mother's lessons on Biblical scripture and the sinful nature of homosexuality. As a result, Ijeoma interconnects her mother's adamant rejection of homosexuality with the Bible, thus making it virtually impossible for her to separate faith and homophobia. Yet early on, Ijeoma suggests that her mother underwent significant changes and her memories temporarily revitalize her mother's former self. She "tried to bury the memory of those lessons, to act as if they were not part of [her] reality, because claiming them would be like continuing to remember the former version of Mama, the one who believed so much that there was a demon in [her]." <sup>327</sup> Her memories contained the power to revert her mother into her former self who denounced the inherently sinful nature homosexuality because it went against God's intentions for humanity. "Still, I remember," says Ijeoma. This moment of remembering her mother from her childhood highlights the power of memory: past events continue to influence the present and undoubtedly affect the future. Even though her mother has changed, the act of remembering briefly resuscitates her mother as a source of Biblically sanctioned homophobia.

Stories contain truths and within those truths resides power to maintain socio-cultural norms. Ijeoma's exploration of memory via story is an attempt to heal her emotional, psychological, and spiritual wounds. Towards the novel's end, she relates a story told by a young female friend. It was through this story that she learnt of the predetermined path of every Nigerian woman: motherhood. She remembers the legend of the spirit children who float above

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<sup>327</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 59.

udala trees. Legend says that any female who rests below the trees becomes "exceptionally fertile...for the briefest period of time...They cause her to bear sons and daughters, as many as her heart desires."<sup>328</sup> Osita, one of Ijeoma's childhood friends, asks Ijeoma to accompany her to an udala tree with the hopes to acquire this mythical fertility. Both are too young to bear children – they were "eight or nine years old at the time" – but Osita wants to ensure her future as a mother. They must count slowly to one hundred, Osita states, for every second grants "even the tiniest drop of our blessing."<sup>329</sup> Ijeoma questions Osita's commitment to motherhood, especially at this young age. Osita, however, views the legend as a reflection of herself. She must "prepare" to become a mother regardless of whether or not she is biologically mature enough to conceive:

Because nine was not too young to prepare, she said. Because sooner or later we would become somebody's wife, and as wives, it would be our obligation to be fertile, to bear children for our husbands, sons especially, to carry on the family name.

I went along with her in all that she proposed we do, even if to me the gap between legend and reality was not one that my mind was prepared to leap across. To me, the legend was a little like making a wish: it was anyone's guess if the wish ever came true.<sup>330</sup>

Osita's early childhood preparation of pregnancy and motherhood – ideally male children as exemplified by Chibundu's fanatical necessity for a boy – represents a larger socio-cultural rejection female choice. Osita's impressionable nature aside, the tale of the spirit children and her adamant acceptance of its truth highlight the power of story. Stories contain the power to

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<sup>328</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 309.

<sup>329</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 310.

<sup>330</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 310.

influence and sustain socio-cultural norms. Yet Ijeoma's recollection reveals that even at a young age she questioned "the gap between legend and reality."<sup>331</sup> On the other hand, the story reveals truths for Osita: truths about her world and her already confirmed future as a woman/mother/wife.

Adaora's Biblical teachings best exemplify the power of storytelling to maintain socio-cultural and spiritual norms. Ijeoma's battles with negative self-perception originate from her mother's teachings and the incessant feeling that God will not accept her unless she participates in heterosexual reproduction and erases her sexuality. Several chapters center on her mother's teachings. Biblical verses litter each chapter and reinforce the power of Ijeoma's teachings. For, as noted, the novel consists of Ijeoma's memories. Each passage represents a passage committed to memory. During an early Bible lesson on Leviticus 18.22 Ijeoma asks her mother what "abomination" means.<sup>332</sup>

"What is the meaning of abomination?" I asked.

"Simple: something disgusting, disgraceful, a scandal."

"But what exactly is disgusting or disgraceful or scandalous about lying with mankind as with womankind? Does the Bible explain?"

"The fact that the Bible says it's bad is all the reason you need," Mama said.

"Besides, how can people be fruitful and multiply if they carry on in that way?"

Even *that* is scandal enough – the fact that it does not allow for procreation."<sup>333</sup>

Abomination, then, reflects two interconnected ideas: the Bible's condemnation of homosexuality and the "fact" that homosexuality "does not allow for procreation." Over time,

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<sup>331</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 311.

<sup>332</sup> From the King James Version, Leviticus 18.22 reads, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind, it is abomination" (*The Bible*, Leviticus 8.22).

<sup>333</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 75.

Ijeoma embodies her mother's words as she views herself as an abomination due to her feelings towards Amina and Ndidi. Christianity – at least Christianity as interpreted by her mother – views homosexuality as incompatible with God's vision of heterosexual reproduction. Initially resistant towards her mother's interpretations, Ijeoma later internalizes the assumption that she is an abomination in the eyes of God.

Whereas Ndidi does not reveal her spiritual inclinations, Amina's story further confirms the power of the Bible as a source of sexual guilt. Amina receives a similar Biblical upbringing as Ijeoma and it prevents her from fully committing to her relationship with Ijeoma. Both girls attend the same all-female boarding school and, upon discovering one another, immediately restart their interrupted relationships. As the two rest in adjacent beds after an intimate evening, Amina awakes from a dream, body shaking, and spouting apocalyptic imagery: "Hailstones...and fire, pouring down and forming craters where they landed."<sup>334</sup> Ijeoma, sleeping beside her, laughs, "Sounds to me like the book of Revelation." Amina's dream has immediate consequences as she questions their relationship – "Maybe we are the fallen children, the sinful ones without the strength to continue" – to which Ijeoma responds with an emphatic "No." "We are far from fallen children," she states. Amina's dream externalizes her internal stress and her spiritual upbringing: she cannot be in a relationship with Ijeoma and also be Christian. Ijeoma tries to save their relationship by holding her hand and writing love notes. Nevertheless, Amina slowly distances herself from Ijeoma. One day, Ijeoma notices her with a boy. Everything about Amina is different: she wears a lacy blouse, a short skirt and earrings like "teardrops." "There she was," Ijeoma remembers, "Amina trying to be beautiful, even if she already was."<sup>335</sup> As she approaches Amina, she watches Amina place her arms around the boy. Ijeoma taps her on the

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<sup>334</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 155.

<sup>335</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 168.



shoulder and grabs her by the waist. Amina, "very shocked" at Ijeoma's behavior, does nothing. The boy, too, grabs Amina by the waist "as if he had not noticed that I was standing there." Amina tells Ijeoma she is sorry and returns to the boy. Ijeoma walks away, disheartened and isolated. Their relationship never recovers. Years later at graduation, after years of non-communication, Amina reveals that she is engaged to be married to a young man from the nearby all-male boarding school.

Broken hearted over Amina's rejection and impending nuptials, Ijeoma returns home to work for her mother at her grocery store. During this time, Adaora pressures Ijeoma to search for a husband. Yet Ijeoma infuriates her by refusing to actively attract a husband. "Time is passing," says Adaora. If Ijeoma is to have a child, she must find a husband. "A woman without a man is hardly a woman at all. You won't stay young forever."<sup>336</sup> As narrated in the spirit child legend, a woman's role is to reproduce; without a husband, a woman cannot fully perceive herself as a woman. Adaora uses a metaphor of a bicycle to depict heterosexual marriage and the reproductive purpose of manhood/womanhood: "The man is one wheel...the woman the other. One wheel must come before the other, and the other wheel has no choice but to follow. What is certain, though, is that neither wheel is able to function fully without the other. And what use is it to exist in the world as a partially functioning human being?"<sup>337</sup> Ijeoma remains silent during his mother's lecture. Heterosexual relationships fully realize human potential; without heterosexual relationships, marriage, and procreation, neither man nor woman will ever become a fully realized person. The size and shape of the bicycle does not matter as long as "the bicycle is complete, that the bicycle has two wheels."<sup>338</sup> Adaora's Biblically ordained heterosexuality falls

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<sup>337</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>338</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 182.

to the wayside; she substitutes religiosity, however briefly, with material technology. Human bodies correlate with Adaora's bicycle metaphor: just as a bicycle requires two wheels to be called a bicycle, men and women are not men and women unless they fulfill their predetermined obligations. One day, Ijeoma's friend Chibundu, who she had not seen since childhood, walks into the grocery store. After weeks of asking her on a date and her mother's incessant pressure, Ijeoma accepts his offer and eventually marry months later.

Wed with a husband, Ijeoma tries to convince herself of the righteousness of her actions. However, she continues to think of Amina, as well as Ndidi, a local schoolteacher she met and dated while working in the grocery store. Ndidi also introduced her to the local lesbian scene. After Ndidi invites Ijeoma to the local hangout, she informs Ijeoma that is "not the kind of place you want to go around talking about."<sup>339</sup> She must enforce a strict code of secrecy for the sake of the community's safety. Ijeoma, however, is unaware of where Ndidi plans to take her. Ndidi refuses to reveal the place, but asks Ijeoma not to tell her mother about it. "'Because mentioning it to anyone,'" says Ndidi, "'can cost some of us, if not all of us, our lives.'" The congregation spot is a "dimly lit church-like structure" on an isolated dirt road. Banners drape the outside walls: Friend in Jesus Church of God and Fountain of Love. Ndidi reveals that the group's former safe space camouflaged as a church. People discovered the space's true intentions and burnt the building to the ground. Their new space, however, also functioned as a place of worship during the day, thus melding spirituality with sexuality. The two enter into the strobe-light lit room, dressed in purple drapes with candles glowing on tables surrounding a dance floor. Music plays, "toned-down, very restrained," as female couples dance and sway. Ndidi introduces Ijeoma to Adanna, Ndidi's school colleague. As Ijeoma and Ndidi talk, Ijeoma's years of her mother's

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<sup>339</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 190.

Biblical teachings bubble upward and her feelings towards Ndidi leads her to believe that she has betrayed Amina, producing a "surge of anxiety":

My thoughts of Amina faded into thoughts of Mama, and of her Bible studies, and of the grammar school teacher's scolding, and of all those threats of stoning.

Though I had not been convinced by any of Mama's interpretations of the Bible, I could not help the anxiety that was building in me, frantic and questioning thoughts: Just what are you doing in a place like this? What business does a respectable young woman have in an underground place like this?<sup>340</sup>

Ironically, the "underground place" is a church, a point Ijeoma fails to recognize as a symbol of a mutual relationship between faith and sexuality. However, Ndidi's presence draws Ijeoma back into the moment, granting her brief mental clarity: "I banished all thoughts of Amina, and of Mama's Bible studies, and of the grammar school teacher's scolding, and of stonings. I told myself to enjoy, just enjoy."<sup>341</sup> In this newfound space, Ijeoma is allowed to exist without thoughts or cares of the outside world. Only upon leaving their world must Ndidi and Ijeoma return to playing the role of platonic friends.

Ijeoma and Ndidi's relationship falls apart after the violent group discovers and destroys the underground community and murders one of its members. Like the organization's previous space, people outside of the community uncovered the church's after hours activities and, in a violent raid, remove all of the attendants. Most of the women escape through the back of the church and hide in a bunker located in the backyard. The women use wartime methods to conceal the bunker with palm fronds and grass. Their methods, however, are an improvement on

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<sup>340</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 192.

<sup>341</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

wartime strategies for there's "were harder to detect than those of our war days."<sup>342</sup> Secured in the bunker, the women quickly realize Adanna is missing. Ijeoma remembers the chaos of the moment: a mixture of sharp hushes, "screams and cries and a man's thundering voice, as if reciting a prayer."<sup>343</sup> The screams dissipate, leaving the heavy stench of "burning tires in the air." Ijeoma continues:

We had hardly walked two yards when we saw, in the backyard of the church, a flame of orange and blue. A stack of burning logs. Ndidi began to cry, and then all of us were crying too, because we had all seen what remained of the face, and we had all recognized her: Adanna in the midst of the logs, burning and burning and turning to ashes right before our eyes.<sup>344</sup>

Ijeoma's taciturn language relates basic observations. She simply relates what she saw. As a result of Adanna's death, Ndidi and Ijeoma decide that it is in their best safety to separate. Now separated as romantic partners, Ijeoma tells Ndidi of Chibundu's advances. Ndidi suggests that Ijeoma accept Chibundu. Although they maintain communication briefly, the two eventually stop speaking to one another, leaving Ijeoma wondering what may have become of their lives together. They send letters to one another during Ijeoma's marriage that helps maintain their relationship over the years.

Her self-deprecating attitude and sense of failure as a "proper" woman culminates during a visit to her local church. She questions her inability to love her husband Chibundu as she loved Amina and Ndidi. Ijeoma prays over her mother's teachings and the "real possibility of God

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<sup>342</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 207.

<sup>343</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 208.

<sup>344</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 208-209.

punishing me for the nature of my love."<sup>345</sup> The threat of a vindictive God conflicts with her faith in Jesus and the beneficent God of the New Testament. She wonders what her punishment would be for "was not all out punishment taken care of by Jesus on the cross?"<sup>346</sup> She cannot find answers in prayer nor can she interpret the Bible in a way that provides emotional and spiritual comfort. During her prayer session, Chibundu finds her. She had been gone for hours, he says, and asks what is troubling her. Ijeoma utters the word "abomination" which Chibundu repeats in kind. The word "abomination," Ijeoma believes, should trigger an immediate affiliation with homosexuality. Chibundu, however, denies any knowledge of the word or its relationship with homosexuality. This is has more to do with Chibundu's rejection of organized religion than it does to his knowledge about homosexuality. Nevertheless, Ijeoma questions whether Chibundu simply ignored cryptic revelation due to his love towards her or if he truly did not know its Biblical implications.

With no one to emotionally confide in, she turns to God as a source of personal strength and resiliency. Her silent exchanges with God feel helpful, but she cannot understand why God does not respond to her pleas. She is left searching for a sense of guidance that never comes:

I thought about what my life had become: Daily visits to church. Daily unrequited conversations with God. Speaking more and more to God, demanding that He speak back to me. *Dear God, can you please just open Your mouth and say something? Anything. I need Your guidance. I need you. I need. Dear God. Please, just open Your mouth and speak.*<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 228.

<sup>346</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 229.

<sup>347</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 233.

Her spiritual loneliness and feeling of abandonment are a result of her mother's teachings and Chibundu's continued pressure to bear him another child. No one actually listens to her words – her mother outright rejects her sexuality and Chibundu's presumptive understanding of her internal struggles reinforces his ignorance of his wife – leaving her searching for any form of comfort. Although she questions whether or not God speaks to her or even listens to her pleas for guidance, she continues to speak. Yet she cannot hear if God responds and without God's voice, all she is left with are her mother's Biblical interpretations. Her feelings of shame and guilt stem from both her mother's teachings and God's failure to respond to her questions.

Chibundu and Adaora both perceive Ijeoma's marriage as representative of her heterosexuality. Whereas Chibundu intentionally ignores her sexuality, Adaora envisions her daughter's marriage as Ijeoma's transformation from homosexuality to heterosexuality. From the day Chibundu entered into Ijeoma's life, Adaora celebrates her daughter's potential future as a wife and mother. As a result, Ijeoma internalizes her feelings of inadequacy. Upon marrying Chibundu, Ijeoma reluctantly allows him to have sex with her. She "dreaded" the sound of Chibundu undoing his pants zipper; it "was as if a sharp object had somehow been jabbed into my ears."<sup>348</sup> Ijeoma compares herself to a "snail protected by its hard shell" who retreats at the first sign of potential harm. Chibundu notices her apprehension and eventually falls asleep. On their second night of marriage, Chibundu informs Ijeoma that they will wait until she felt ready, which, Ijeoma acknowledges, will never happen. Nevertheless, she eventually accepts his advances. Her willingness to sleep with Chibundu stemmed from the hope of motherhood. Not because she wished to become a mother, but to use motherhood as an opportunity to forget Ndid

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<sup>348</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 235.

and become "invested in the marriage." Yet she cannot entirely divest from her relationship with Ndidi as she writes to her on occasion and keeps Ndidi's responses in a dresser drawer.

Although Chibundu rejects Christianity and all forms of organized religion, he symbolizes patriarchal control over women and privileges male heirs to female. He views her as a source of children as opposed to a partner in marriage. Unlike her relationship with Ndidi, her relationship with Chibundu is predetermined by gendered expectations. After Ijeoma birthed their daughter, Chibundu appeared dejected. She must produce a son, he proclaims, and incessantly prods Ijeoma to sleep with him. Ndidi's letters offer a pleasant salve of memories to help offset her current situation; however, Chibundu discovers these letters. He is unsure of how to handle the situation: he oscillates from anger to acceptance. He is furious over her relationship with Ndidi ("You are *my* wife, for God's sake. I can do things to make your life miserable") yet he tells her that she can continue her communications ("You can do whatever you will with those letters. You can even continue to write to her").<sup>349</sup> His tentative acceptance of her relationship with Ndidi does not undo his desire to maintain patriarchal control over her and the household. The day after discovering the letters, he admits that he "was a little rough on you last night." He again sways between accepting her homosexuality and reinforcing her legal marriage commitments:

"I don't hate you for it," he said. "I really don't. You know already that I don't believe all that nonsense about abominations. Maybe there's something special about that kind of love, about a man loving another man, or a woman loving another woman in that way. Maybe there's something appealing about it. But what makes me so angry is that I loved you first. Before there was her, there was me.

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<sup>349</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 283.

And more than that, you made me a promise. Marriage is a promise, not just to marry, but also to love."<sup>350</sup>

Chibundu, desperate to maintain his marriage, tries to understand Ijeoma's feelings towards Ndidi but he cannot fully comprehend her feelings. His anger originates not from her relationship with Ndidi but the fact that she entered into marriage with the knowledge that her commitment involves loving Chibundu. His pettiness surfaces when he projects her feelings onto her, suggesting that their childhood relationship makes him more important than Ndidi since he was in her life years before Ndidi's arrival. Nevertheless, he foresees the possibility that their marriage may end. He will not dissolve marriage, however, without Ijeoma first birthing him a son: "And if all else fails, I really do want my son."<sup>351</sup> Her initial reluctance to accept Chibundu's advances diminishes over time and she eventually "relented and gave in wholeheartedly to trying with him for a boy":<sup>352</sup>

I made up my mind to try and get pregnant again. As if just getting pregnant was a kind of guarantee that it would be the boy child that he so desperately wanted, the boy child on account of which I now felt myself Chibundu's hostage. But I prayed it would be so, prayed enough for both of us, enough for at least ten others. If he would only get his son, then maybe I would finally be excused from any more of those nighttime obligations. Maybe I could finally be released from this captivity of a marriage. [...] Please, Lord, I begged.<sup>353</sup>

Ijeoma and Chibundu reiterate Adaora's perspective on marriage: its sole purpose is reproduction. Ijeoma relents to Chibundu's advances with the hope of escaping what she

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<sup>350</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 285.

<sup>351</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 285.

<sup>352</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 304.

<sup>353</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 305



perceives as an inhospitable and hostile relationship. She turns to prayer as a source of guidance, support, and a potential source of escape. After years in her unhappy marriage, Ijeoma's prayers are finally answered with the courage to escape, daughter in tow, to her mother's homestead. Her mother, the source of her emotional, psychological, and spiritual traumas, transforms into her safe haven as she ultimately concedes her pigheadedness in refusing to accept Ijeoma as she is.

The novel concludes, to use Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi words, with an "unfinished reconciliation"<sup>354</sup> as it skips years ahead after she successfully fled to her mother and left her marriage. It is 13 January 2014, the day president Jonathan signed the "Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2013" into law. Ijeoma comments on the continued violence against queer Nigerians alongside utopic visions of queer futurity. Adaora, still coming to terms with her daughter's sexuality, condemns homophobic violence and its affiliations with Christian institutions. She reads reports "that a bunch of God-preaching hooligans stoned and beat several members of a gay and lesbian-affirming church." Adaora spitefully declares, "*Tufiakwa!*" God forbid! 'Even among Christians, it can't be the same God that we worship!'"<sup>355</sup> These violent deaths do not prevent Ijeoma from envisioning a future Nigeria open to non-normative individuals and communities. Nigeria's future may rest in imaginative conceptualizations of Biblical teachings whereby the Bible's vision does not promote static societies chained and bound to its teachings. Of the several central characters, Adaora undergoes the most extensive personal alterations. Her primary role is that of Biblical authority. She also represents the continuation of heterosexual reproduction as she searches for Ijeoma's potential husband. As I noted earlier, Adaora enforces Biblical teachings upon Ijeoma so as to cleanse her daughter of un-Christian thoughts. Her teachings occupy a significant portion of the novel whereby she goes

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<sup>354</sup> Osinubi, pp. xi.

<sup>355</sup> Okparanta, pp. 317.

through specific Biblical passages and dogmatically interprets their positions on homosexuality. Alterations to Biblical teachings and utopic visions of future Nigerian towns are not the only solutions. Adaora reflects upon realistic opportunities of change, specifically the actions of President Goodluck Jonathan. She wonders why he does not prevent illegal vigilante justice against queer Nigerians: "You know, it really is a shame that our president, the really good-looking man that he is – between that handsome smile and his fashionable fedora hats – it's too bad he doesn't do anything to correct the situation. Such a waste of good looks. A handsome face has a way of persuading the masses. The least he can do is try and use his good looks for a noble cause"<sup>356</sup> Adaora jokingly highlights Jonathan's presidential power, his ability to sway the Nigerian public, and his persuasive politics. Okparanta needles Jonathan's presidency, castigating his failure to condone violent retribution against queer Nigerians. His dedication to fashionable details could be occupied with more pertinent social issues. The fact that it is Adaora who condemns Jonathan further demonstrates how dire the situation remains for queer Nigerians: if she can overcome her extreme prejudices, then the Nigerian president surely can redeem himself and Nigerian society from its state-sanctioned homophobia.

Whereas Adaora condemns religious-affiliated violence, Ndidi opines for a utopic future. Although Ndidi and Ijeoma do not live together for "a relationship like our is still too a dangerous thing," they frequently spend their nights together. During these intimate evenings, Ndidi wraps herself around Ijeoma's body, telling her stories of a "town where love is allowed to be love." Ndidi provides detailed directions to the town's location, but every time Ijeoma asks her the name of the town, Ndidi falls asleep. One night, Ndidi provides an answer:

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<sup>356</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 318.

One night, she mumbles that it is Aba. The next night it is Umuahia. With each passing night she names more towns: Ojoto and Nnewi, Onitsha and Nsukka, Port Harcourt and Lagos, Uyo and Oba, Kaduna and Sokoto. She names and names, so that I eventually have to laugh and say, "How is it that this town can be so many places at once?"<sup>357</sup>

Ndidi, her voice roughed with age and experience, answers Ijeoma: "All of them are here in Nigeria. You see, this place will be all of Nigeria."<sup>358</sup> Of the two, Ndidi's proclamation of a queered Nigeria reinforces her ability to elevate herself above her experiences. Ijeoma adopts Ndidi's hopeful visions of the future; however, she projects a future premised upon new and open interpretations of tradition and Biblical scripture. Ndidi thoughts, though, arise on the precipice of sleep and the arena of dream. Ijeoma observes how Ndidi had not specified these towns before drifting off to sleep, leaving her stories incomplete. She finally brings her dreams to light as she lists several Nigerian towns and cities.

The dream of a postcolonial Nigerian state acceptant of homosexuality remains a dream. The novel concludes with dreams: dreams of a revitalized and reimagined Christianity; dreams of a queer Nigerian state; and dreams of peace and harmony regardless of sexuality. At the beginning of the novel, Ijeoma relates her mother's words about dreams and how "dreams were the way in which we resolved our problems, that every problem could be solved if we paid close attention to the tiniest details in our dreams."<sup>359</sup> *Under the Udala Trees* represents this dream vision, a work whose tiniest details may open different avenues for representing queer Nigerians within literature and within Nigeria itself. Yet Okparanta's final words in the Epilogue remove

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<sup>357</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 321.

<sup>358</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 321.

<sup>359</sup> *ibid.*, 26.

the reader from their dream-state to remind them of realities, of renewed fights against homosexuality in Nigeria and the necessity to remember lost and silenced voices. Okparanta reinserts queer Nigerian memory into Nigerian history – directly into the Nigerian Civil War. As Nigerians fought and killed one another, queer Nigerians fought for survival. As Nigeria worked to piece together broken communities, queer Nigerians fought insistent efforts of erasure.

Ijeoma's story is the story of queer Nigerians who cannot exist publically due to the possibility of physical retribution or death. *Under the Udala Trees* poetically hopes for queer African futurity. But before such futurity can come into fruition, it requires historical acknowledgment, a re-membling of long silenced queer communities that have lived within Nigeria for years.<sup>360</sup> Similarly to Maddy's empowerment of voiceless Leoneans, Okparanta reinserted voiceless queer Nigerians back into Nigerian history. She explained her hopes for Nigeria's future relations with queer communities: "I do hope that there comes a time when Nigerians finally accept that homosexuality is in fact a natural part of our society just as it is with all other societies."<sup>361</sup> Although Okparanta transforms Nigeria into a singular global outlier, her hope sounds tentative. Her idealized Nigeria may not come true any time in the near future nor can she foresee a time when it will. Yet *Under the Udala Trees* begins the process of actualizing her vision.

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<sup>360</sup> I am thinking of *'yan daudu*, or men who dress and act as women, who live predominantly in the Muslim Hausa-land region in northern Nigeria. Rudolf P. Gaudio's extensive research on *'yan daudu* emphasizes performativity and how their "social practices are performatively articulated through a number of bodily practices, including the work they do cooking and selling food, and their frequent but variable use of *maganar mata* 'women's talk' [*sic*]" (37). See Gaudio's "White Men Do It Too: Racialized (Homo)sexualities in Postcolonial Hausaland."

<sup>361</sup> Ramakrishnan, JR. "Queerness, Womanity and Hope: A Conversation with Chinelo Okparanta, Author of *Under the Udala Trees*." *ElectricLit.com*. 22 September 2015.

*Fairytales for Lost Children*

British-Nigerian author Bernardine Evaristo's novel *Mr. Loverman* follows Barrington Jedidiah Walker, known as Willy amongst friends and family, a 76-year old gay Antiguan man who struggles with his sexuality. He struggles to inform his wife, Carmel, of his long-standing relationship with his life-long friend and partner, Morris. When Willy and Carmel immigrated to London after their wedding, Morris emigrated soon afterwards. After accidentally spilling his secret to his grandson while in a heated, drunken argument, Willy finds himself on the verge of personal collapse. As he struggles with his demons, Morris turns to literature as explores his sexuality. As Morris tries to understand the sociocultural implications surrounding his sexuality –simultaneously as Antiguan and British – Willy refuses to explore what it means to be queer and black in twenty-first century Britain. He collects several books by prominent gay male writers, including those of Philip Hensher and Alan Hollinghurst. One of the authors "waiting in the wings" on his bedside table is British-Somali writer Diriye Osman.<sup>362</sup>

Osman's inclusion in Evaristo's novel is not mere coincidence. She commissioned Osman to write a piece for the Winter 2012 volume of *Poetry Review*.<sup>363</sup> Osman composed the story "Watering the Imagination," which then became the first story in his debut collection *Fairytales for Lost Children*. "Watering the Imagination" opines on the prominence of stories in Somalia and its diaspora, as well as the importance of homeland. Told from the point of view of an unnamed mother coming to terms with her daughter's sexuality, the story is the foundation for the collection as a whole. The mother meditates on her life as she watches her fellow Somali flee

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<sup>362</sup> Evaristo, Bernardine. *Mr. Loverman*. Akashic Books, 2013, pp. 255.

<sup>363</sup> Osman, Diriye. "No Longer Silent: Chronicling Queer African Lives." *Huffington Post*. 2 Feb. 2016.

for a better life. But even as the diaspora spreads to Europeans lands, stories remain vital for the continuation of Somali culture.

I have spent my whole life near the coast of Bosaaso, Somalia [*sic*]. I don't know any other land. While the boat people, those who are hungry for new homes in places like London and Luxembourg, risk their lives on cargo ships, I stand firm on this soil and I tell stories. I tell stories to my daughters about kings and warrior queens, freedom-fighters and poets. I tell these stories to remind my children and myself that Somalia is fertile with history and myth. The only seed that needs regular watering is our imagination.<sup>364</sup>

Stories retain memories of origin. Origin not solely in terms of place, but of "history and myth." The mother insists she "stand firm on this soil" to "tell stories" of her heritage. Individuals, too, can compose their own myths, she says. One only has to throw their "hopes and dreams" into the ocean. These dreams, written on pieces of paper and attached to stones, expressed unspeakable desires. She explains, "My mother and my mother's mother used to do this. To us it's a way of expressing some of the things we cannot verbalise. It's a way of sharing our most intimate secrets without shame or fear. In doing so, we have created our own mythology and history." Indeed, the unnamed mother's emphasis on storytelling confirms Abdalla Omar Mansur's observation: "To understand Somali culture, one must consider the extreme importance of oral poetry."<sup>365</sup>

Furthermore, the mother's adherence to history and myth does not preclude her from envisioning different futures. Her daughter, Suldana, exemplifies the fluidity of both Somali identity and culture. Although she does not understand why Suldana "loves the way she does" or

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<sup>364</sup> Osman, Diriye. *Fairytales for Lost Children*. Team Angelica Publishing, 2013.

<sup>365</sup> Mansur, Abdalla Omar. "Contrary to a Nation: The Cancer of the Somali State." *The Invention of Somalia*. Ed. Ali Jimale Ahmed. Red Sea Press, 1995, pp. 109.

"loves who she does," she allows her to "dream in a way that my generation was not capable of."<sup>366</sup> She views Suldana as a connective piece between history and myth with futurity. The story concludes: "Suldana must take that history and forge her own future. And when she does go forth, I will honour my promise as her parent and go forth with her. We will not turn back."<sup>367</sup> Nevertheless, Osman writes about Somalia from a distance. For him, Somalia represents his origins, but it is also a place he and his family were forced to leave. Every story excepting for "Watering" is set outside of Somalia. All of his characters celebrate their being Somali, be it through cultural traditions or through their Islamic heritage. Although the mother speaks of the land's fertility, the ocean, too, holds the imaginative potential. Perhaps these tales resonated on an emotional, cultural, and social level for Morris in *Mr. Loverman*, for he, too, battles with being a queer black man living in an unfamiliar world. All that is left is the man for whom he scaled the Atlantic to be with.

This unnamed mother's perspectives – on the making of history and myth, on storytelling and the necessity of dreaming – spread outward into the entirety of *Fairytales for Lost Children*. For the collection encases Osman's hopes and dreams; he composed his hopes for the future through these stories. Mining autobiographic details for his fictional tales, he invokes personal discord in an effort to re-member ignored and erased queer Somali identities. *Fairytales for Lost Children* range from short, intimate pieces to lengthy explorations of sexuality, mental health, and Islam. Alongside origin stories, and tales of mental breakdowns, Osman envisions a utopic, but hopefully not too distant, future whereby individuals and communities can fully express their queer Somali identities without constant fear of social repercussion. Furthermore, Islam and Somali culture's Islamic heritage play significant roles as characters interrogate their faith as both

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<sup>366</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>367</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 4.

a site of homophobia and as one of personal strength and spiritual guidance. Incapable of separating sexuality from spirituality, characters undercut "traditional" conceptualizations of Somali culture by neither renouncing their sexuality or their Islamic faith. Osman's narratives of Somali sexuality do not denounce government-supported legislation nor do they highlight histories of Somali sexualities. Rather, they explore interpersonal relationships, the pervading presence of Islam, and the ever-present concern for physical, mental, and spiritual safety. Yet several stories escape socio-cultural restrictions. Unbound by tradition, these stories ponder what a new Somalia may look like and the imaginative capital necessary to envision these worlds.

Homosexuality in Somalia has not received nor has it attracted international attention. Generally speaking, homosexuality is taboo within Somali culture and same-sex loving individuals typically live private lives. The potential threat of violence prevents many forms of public display of non-normative sexual identities. This threat also stems from the criminalization of homosexuality as established in the state's Penal Code. Similarly to Nigeria's colonial-era legislation, British occupation of Somalia from 1884 to 1960, when Somalia was then known as British Somaliland, resulted in the legislation of sodomy laws. Upon achieving independence in 1960, the Somali government retained the British colonial legislation with the inclusion of provision in its Penal Code that specifically criminalized homosexuality. Under Article 409, any individual convicted of "carnal intercourse with a person of the same sex" may be sentenced three months to three years maximum imprisonment. The same article also includes an ambiguous distinction between "carnal intercourse" and "act of lust."<sup>368</sup> Any individual convicted of the latter may receive a punishment "reduced by one third." The code does not

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<sup>368</sup> Under Article 398, "carnal intercourse" is defined as the "penetration of the [*sic*] male sexual organ." See Aengus Carroll and Lucas Paoli Itaborahy's *State Sponsored-Homophobia* for further details.



define "lust" nor provide interpretative guidelines.<sup>369</sup> In addition to the state-sponsored legislation, Somalia's poor United Nations voting record concerning LGBTQ issues and its approval of a counter-statement against 2008's "United Nations Declaration on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity" affirms the government's stance against same-sex sexuality both home and abroad.<sup>370</sup>

The central Somali government's enforcement of the legislation is not verifiable. In 2015, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) reported on Somalia's state-sponsored homophobia since the fall of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991 and suggested "the enforcement of the penal code can be questioned."<sup>371</sup> However, the independently declared Somaliland, an internationally recognized autonomous state within Somalia's borders, "still applies the Penal Code." The presence of the militant fundamentalist organization Al-Shabaab and their practice of strict forms of *sharī'ah* law are of great concern for queer Somalis, especially within state's southern region. In early 2017, reports confirmed the public execution of two young men convicted of performing same-sex acts.<sup>372</sup> Furthermore, even though the central Somali government maintains its presence in the United Nations, the fractured state cannot be understood as a homogeneous entity. It is critical to focus on state-sponsored or regional

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<sup>369</sup> Several additional articles include the "act of lust" as a determining factor for punishment. Article 399, subtitled "Acts of Lust Committed with Violence,"

<sup>370</sup> Somalia was one of fifty-four nations, over half of which were African nations, that signed the counter-statement. Of the thirty African nations that signed the statement, Sierra Leone and Rwanda rescinded their position, aligning themselves with the United Nations statement.

<sup>371</sup> Carroll, Aengus and Lucas Paoli Itaborahy. *State-Sponsored Homophobia*. International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, 2015, pp. 63

<sup>372</sup> Ghai, Ritu. "Deciphering Motive: Establishing Sexual Orientation as the 'One Central Reasons' for Persecution in Asylum Claims." *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2012, pp. 522. Also see "Al-Shabab militants in Somalia announce public execution of homosexuals."

approaches to same-sex sexualities. But such a focus does not provide enough information on socio-cultural and religious perceptions about same-sex loving individuals and communities. As it pertains to Osman's stories, none explicitly address state-sponsored oppression. Rather, his strongest stories complicate Somali identity as it pertains to Islam.

Generally speaking, an inseparable bond ties Somali culture together with Islam. To put it bluntly, to be Somali is to be Muslim. The presence of Islam within Somalia and the Horn of Africa, which, in addition to Somalia, includes the modern nations of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, stretches back to Islam's foundations in the early seventh-century. The migration of Islam into the Horn coincided with several waves of Arab migration from the late seventh-century into the tenth-century. The arrival of Islam also led to the unification of the largely "divided nomadic" Somali culture.<sup>373</sup> Michael Shank writes of the migration of Arab and Islamic influence into the Horn:

This influx of Islam typified the height of the Islamic empire, which stretched from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to Central Asia in the east. During the tenth century, the Islamic imperialist state was peaking power and Muslims were slowly becoming the majority in conquered territories like Somalia. In Somalia, though, Muslims did not become the majority populace until the end of the

Islamic golden age – an era which is generally understood as 700-1400 A.D.<sup>374</sup>

The resounding fall of the Islamic empire "dealt a significant and devastating blow to Muslim regional identity" in Somalia.<sup>375</sup> Nevertheless, Islam was wholly integrated into Somali culture,

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<sup>373</sup> Shank, Michael. "Understanding Political Islam in Somalia." *Contemporary Islam*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2007, pp. 5.

<sup>374</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>375</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

albeit without wholly erasing previously existent customs. Bruce A. Collet notes the "overlay of Islam" onto Somali culture:

In tracing the Islamization of Somalia, it is important to note that the process has involved the overlay of Islam on traditional customs and beliefs, which in turn had affected how Islam is lived on a day-to-day basis. Thus, for example, in the rural areas, Somalis have relied more on traditional customs (*xeer* or *heer*) than on the *shari'a* (Islamic religious laws) in regulating their lives.<sup>376</sup>

Collet differentiates between how Islam gradually intertwined with Somali cultural traditions as compared to Islamic *shari'ah*. Islam's most enduring legacy within Somalia is its ability to transcend "clan divisions" for it "provides the single most stable source of strength and public community."<sup>377</sup>

The history homosexuality in Islam and within Islamic communities has received considerable scholarly attention. Indeed, Islam varied global histories and, as anthropologist Lloyd Fallers writes, "Islam has held different meanings for Arabs, Persian, Southeast Asians, and Africans, and in these regional groups, for various segments of society. It has meant different things to particular Muslim communities at different points in their histories."<sup>378</sup> To declare a single Islamic approach and relationship with homosexuality, then, is impossible. Samar Habib's expansive two-volume edited collection *Islam and Homosexuality* navigates queer cultures within the Islamic world, ranging from Indonesia to the Arab world, as it addresses the relationships between homosexuality and Islam. Such a collection advocates for a variety of

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<sup>376</sup> Collet, Bruce A. "Islam, national identity and public secondary education: perspectives from the Somali diaspora in Toronto, Canada." *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, vol. 10, no. 2, July 2007, pp. 139.

<sup>377</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 139.

<sup>378</sup> Qtd. in Will Roscoe and Stephen O. Murray, "Introduction." *Islamic Homosexualities*, edited by Will Roscoe and Stephen O. Murray, New York UP, 1997, p. 4.

historical, socio-cultural, and religious approaches to homosexuality while simultaneously practicing Islam. Will Roscoe and Stephen O. Murray's similarly titled edited collection, *Islamic Homosexualities* rejects the suggestion that Islam maintains a single religious purview or that it wholeheartedly rejects or promotes the persecution of homosexuals.<sup>379</sup> In many ways, Osman's stories operate similarly to the above collections as they bridge the gap between culturally and religiously designated constructs of Somali identity and queerness. As a result, his collection affirms the unbreakable bond between being Somali, Muslim, and queer. Osman's stories bridge the gap between culturally and religiously designated constructs of Somali identity and queerness. His characters affirm the unbreakable bond between being Somali, Muslim, and queer.

Osman, who is also a visual artist, creates photographic self-portraits in addition to his literary work. His portraits meditate on the power of self-construction, which is also a common theme within his stories. He plays methods of self-creation and processes by which one comes to understand one's self in the face of socio-cultural and religious expectations. His self-portraits are standardized: he typically stands in front of a black backdrop and dons makeup with ornate jewelry around his neck and upon his hands. His sartorial and make-up choices on the surface may simply suggest individual freedom. Rather, they affirm the necessity for self-discipline: "With regards to the elaborate costuming and makeup that you see in the photos, they symbolize rigid self-control. I wear makeup and I don dramatic attire because I like control. I'm not interested in controlling others but I'm invested in strict self-governance."<sup>380</sup> His conceptualization of self-creation arises from personal experiences of living in a highly restrictive environment. "I come from a large family with fully realized individuals. However,

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<sup>379</sup> Also see Scott Alan Kugle's *Homosexuality in Islam* and Khaled el-Rouayheb's *Before Homosexuality in the Arab-Islamic World, 1500-1800*.

<sup>380</sup> Jayawardane, Neelika. "Diriye Osman: How to be gay, Muslim, African." *Africa Is a Country*. 8 Dec. 2014.

everybody has their own role and everybody fits into the mosaic. I always felt out of place within the context of that mosaic, that predetermined pattern. This is a feeling carried with me from a very young age: the sense that I did not fit."<sup>381</sup> His search for self-control in the face of a "predetermined pattern" is reflected in several of his stories whereby characters accept their existence within a strict Somali culture yet simultaneously search for interactive ways to bend what that existence means. Osman accentuates the relationship between Islam and Somali identity in several stories. "Tell the Sun Not to Shine," for example, relates the memories of a young man who, in his first Eid alone in south London, discovers that his new imam is the older Kenyan boy with whom he had his first homosexual experiences. Another story, "Shoga," narrates an argument between young gay man who comes out to his traditional Somali grandmother. The emotionally violent argument – the grandmother was "literally gagging" as she spoke – results in his leaving for London.<sup>382</sup> He calls her everyday from London but she refuses to answer her phone. After four years of not answering, someone answers to reveal that she had died a week prior but she had only been found the day of his call. The narrator relates his anger towards her death and how his relative failed to enact proper Islamic burial rites: "In Islam the funeral has to happen immediately after the person's death," he states. His deteriorated relationship with his grandmother did not prevent him from enacting his religious duties as a practicing Muslim. For Osman, Islam and homosexuality are not incompatible; rather, his stories meld together, albeit with difficulty, queerness with Islam.

Characters push how far they can go until they no longer resemble their Somali identity. Indeed, queer Somali identities resist essentialist notions of what it means to be Somali without breaking away from its core cultural tenets, specifically its Islamic connection. Self-creation,

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<sup>381</sup> *ibid.*, n.p.

<sup>382</sup> Osman, *Fairytales for Lost Children*, pp. 40.

then, comes not from allowing oneself personal freedom, but through the examination of staunch self-control. Even as several characters face restrictive Somali and Islamic environments, they simultaneously accept these environments as essential pieces of themselves. They wholeheartedly accept these pieces yet also remake them into something different. *Fairytales for Lost Children* intertwines the boundaries created by familial, social, and religious duties with the individual necessity to both respect and transgress said boundaries. Indeed, many of these stories reflect Osman's philosophy for self-portrait whereby the socially and spiritually "predetermined pattern" does not prevent individuals from exercising self-control.

Settings shift from London to Somalia and Kenya; these shifts, however, rarely influence characters' interpretations of sexuality nor do they function as sites of potential physical or psychological harm. Of the three, London is the most predominant setting. Some characters are new arrivals, such as the nameless male narrator in "Tell the Sun Not to Shine" who celebrates Eid alone. As it is his first Eid in London, he does not know which mosque to attend. Others characters have lived in London for years, only communicating with their families via telephone or with relatives who also live in the city. The titular short story is set in Kenya and follows a young Somali refugee, Hirsi, and his infatuation with a male classmate. He and his family flee Somalia after the collapse of the Siad Barre regime, yet constant police raids intended to capture unwanted refugees prevent any sense of security. Kenyan treatment of homosexuality is not the issue; Osman aligns police raids and threats of deportation with Hirsi's foreseeable future, one of hiding and perpetual insecurity because of his sexuality.

Physically security and personal security are not always compatible. "My Roots Are Your Roots," the collection's closing tale, is a lusty story of two male lovers set in a south London apartment. The nameless Jamaican narrator and his Somali partner, Korfa, make love to one

another to "forget" the world in which they live. They "forget that he comes from a country wrecked by war. He forgets that his family are still back home and in desperate need of money." The narrator forgets "that my family would kill me if they found out. I forget that by loving Korfa my life is in danger."<sup>383</sup> Imagination offers boundless potential to escape socio-cultural restrictions. The ability to temporarily forget grants them brief immunity to their lived realities. Similarly to the "Watering the Imagination," "My Root Are Your Roots" invokes the power of imagination and dreaming. For imagination and dreaming hold keys to altering the future. Korfa and his Jamaican partner's London apartment transforms into their "secret garden" whose "magic...is that it exists in our imagination." Their secret garden has "no limits, no borderlines. The secret garden leads to the marigolds of Mogadishu and the magnolias of Kingston and when the heat turns us sticky and sweet and unwilling to be claimed by defeat we own the night. We own our bodies. We own our lives."<sup>384</sup> Osman's defiantly queer characters engage with transnational homophobia through diasporic queerness that extends from east Africa to Jamaica to London. Korfa and his lover reclaim Mogadishu and Kingston for themselves, as do they their bodies and lives.

"Your Silence Will Not Protect You" offers the most evident example of Islamic influence within Somali culture. Autobiographical in nature, the story follows Diriyeh, an openly queer man who suffers from "psychotic episodes," and his emotional responses to his family's negativity towards his sexuality. Islam, however, operates on two levels: as a forced religious identity and as a source of personal salvation. The story opens with Diriyeh praying as he suffers through a psychotic episode:

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<sup>383</sup> Osman, pp. 156.

<sup>384</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 156.

It required strength to make the call. I prayed on it. Not the usual prayer that my parents had taught me, that I had been caned and cajoled in practising when I was younger: this was more primal and urgent. As the voices grew louder I began to tremble. I hadn't slept or eaten properly for weeks.

It was a simple prayer. 'Allah, you have brought me here. Please help me.'<sup>385</sup>

Diriye turns to Allah as a source of personal guidance. The opening suggests a difference between the instillation of religious faith through his parents and his personal relationship with Allah. As a child, his parents forced him to learn prayers. As a young person struggling with psychotic breaks, his relationship with Allah offers spiritual security.

Conversely, Diriye's family uses their spiritual and cultural heritage to denounce his sexuality. His older sister, an initial source of support, criticizes Diriye for failing to abide by Somali cultural and religious values. Diriye offers an extensive examination into his sister's allegations, ostensibly analyzing her motives. The following paragraph steps outside the story. Osman as writer, as a queer Somali, summarizes the importance of tradition within Somali culture and the potential conflicts laden in exhibiting non-normative sexualities.

What I correctly read into that was that my older sister was embarrassed and, despite her earlier promises of support, didn't want to associate herself with the shame of having a proudly gay brother. The Somali community is all about tradition and that sense of tradition comes with an air of secretiveness, suppression and Puritanism. I had no desire to live in secrecy anymore. I had experienced what it was like to lead an open, healthy, guilt-free life and I liked it.

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<sup>385</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 103.



It felt natural and necessary. I wasn't ready to come out to my entire family yet but as it turned out I had no say in the matter: my sister sped up the process for me.<sup>386</sup>

In this paragraph, Osman reveals his personal experiences as queer in a strict Somali family.<sup>387</sup> To be openly queer comes with the potential disintegration of familial relationships. And, as evidence by his sister's betrayal, traditional values override personal relationships. Other stories in the collection envision similar scenarios of familial discord. "My Roots Are Your Roots" briefly touches on how the unnamed narrator's family would "kill [him] if they found out," while "Earthling" concludes with a queer woman's denouncement of her sister's homophobic husband. "Your Silence Will Not Protect You" delves deepest into the emotional conflict between queerness and Somali tradition and faith.

The story concludes with a brief conversation between Diriye and his father. They had not spoken for years at this point. His father calls after discovering some of Diriye's artwork and writings online. Some of it troubled him, he says, namely Diriye's comment that he led a "difficult life." Diriye ignores his father's concerns to which his father retorts his confusion about "this gay business." Although Diriye had spoken previously about his sexuality, his father "assumed it was the mental illness speaking." Distraught over his father's remarks, Diriye reaffirms his being a gay man. "This is not our custom," his father responds. "We have a faith. Are you telling me that you're not a Muslim?" Queerness and Islam are incompatible in his mind. It is impossible to be a Muslim gay man. Diriye, however, denies his father's essentialist interpretation. "I am a Muslim but I'm also very gay and I like it."<sup>388</sup> Similarly to his earlier

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<sup>386</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 110.

<sup>387</sup> See Osman's piece "How Mental Illness Fed My Creativity."

<sup>388</sup> Osman, pp. 114.

psychotic episode, Diriye finds himself encaged, incapable of fully expressing himself without blowback. His father presumes Diriye's sexuality stems not from his desires but is a result of his mental instability, thereby linking sexual deviancy with mental disorders. Furthermore, Diriye's father interconnects Islam with heterosexuality. For him, one cannot be both Muslim and homosexual. "Your Silence Will Not Protect You" offers the clearest representation of the relationship between Islam and homosexuality. Whereas other stories indicate each character as Muslim, be it through the practice of religious ceremonies or knowledge of Islamic practices and customs, "Silence" underscores the frictional relationship between Islam and homosexuality. And, with Islam and Somali culture being so intertwined, the inherent conflict between Somali identity and homosexuality poses a threat to queer Somali livelihood.

"Ndambi" explicitly communicates Osman's attitudes towards being queer, Somali, and Muslim. The story, told by a self-identified "black African Muslim lesbian" named Ndambi, opens with her sister's condemnation. "I pray that the shatan leaves your spirit," says Ndambi's sister, "I pray that you find a man because lesbianialism can be cured. I *pray* that Allah cures you. I *pray*."<sup>389</sup> "Shatan," also spelled "shaitan" and "shaytan," is Arabic for the devil.<sup>390</sup> Ndambi's sister invokes spiritual cleansing in response to Ndambi's open acceptance of her sexuality. All that Ndambi needs, her sister proclaims, "is to find a good man and settle down."<sup>391</sup> Ironically, the sister's advice fails to consider that her heterosexual marriage resulted in five pregnancies and a husband who left for a younger, more attractive woman. Ndambi

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<sup>389</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 70.

<sup>390</sup> In the Qur'an, Satan is also called *Iblis*. Furthermore, the Arabic for Satan is *al-shaytan* is sometimes accompanied by the *al-rajim* which has been translated into "stoned," "pelted with stones," and "accursed." The phrase *al-shaytan al-rajim* is interpreted as "the stoned Satan," which, as Adam Silverstein argues, refers "to the fact that Satan is physically pelted with stones, both on earth and in the astral sphere" (21). See Silverstein's "On the Original Meaning of the Qur'anic Term *al-shaytan al-rajim*."

<sup>391</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 70.

expresses satirical defiance: she refuses her sister's "faux-sympathy" and mocks her "faux-pious" attitude. She refuses the argument that heterosexual relationships offer greater forms of spiritual and personal security. Ndambi's personal story – a brief narrative about a recent break-up – concludes with her search for freedom. Her quest for freedom, security, and love begins with Mohammed and how society has excluded her from his visions:

The Prophet once said that dreams are a window into the unseen. I have been told many times by family, friends, colleagues and strangers that I, a black African Muslim lesbian, am not included in this vision; that my dreams are a reflection of my upbringing in a decadent, amoral Western society that has corrupted who I really am. But who am I, really? Am I allowed to speak for myself or must by desires form the battleground for causes I do not care about? My answer to that is simple: 'no one *allows* anyone anything.'<sup>392</sup>

This moment reflects Osman's quest for self-control. Here, Ndambi declares she is black, queer, and Muslim. An open rejection of an essentialist Somali identity, she advocates for self-creation in the face of criticism. She continues, "By rejecting that notion you discover that only you can give yourself permission on how to lead your life, naysayers be damned."<sup>393</sup>

Her quest for self-love and freedom, however, is not without emotional struggle. Memories of her former lover, Adrienne, incessantly invade her thoughts. Her loneliness, exacerbated by her family's rejection of her, makes living a struggle. Yet she awakens everyday to new self-discovery and the knowledge that she finds comfort in her own skin: "Home is in my hair, my lips, my arms, my thighs, my feet and hands. I am my own home. And when I wake up crying in the morning, thinking of how lonely I am, I pinch my skin, tug at my hair, remind

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<sup>392</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 74.

<sup>393</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 74.

myself that I am alive."<sup>394</sup> Ndambi refuses to be worn down by traumas of familial disconnection and social rejection. These final life-affirming words set in the middle of the collection solidify Osman's foundational philosophy: there is no one way to be queer, Muslim, or Somali.

### *Conclusion*

Of the chosen works, *Under the Udala Trees* and *Fairytales for Lost Children* explore the conflicting intersections between sexuality and religion. The condemnation of religious institutions as prime source of homophobia, while based within verifiable truths, fails to recognize the critical importance of religion for many queer Africans. These institutions are essential for the continued survival of many queer African lives and they must not only be acknowledged but explored. For its realist examination of female homosexuality in Nigeria, *Under the Udala Trees* begins and concludes with a pronounced affirmation of dreaming. Okparanta frames dreaming as a powerful tool for comprehending daily realities. Without dreaming, without the power to imagine new and different futures, Nigeria will continue to support the criminalization and demonization of homosexuality. Likewise, Osman's short stories envision futures for queer Somalis through the act of writing about them. Furthermore, he rejects the notion that one cannot be both queer and Somali as well as queer and Muslim. Both works reveal inherent truths for many queer Africans: they turn to spiritual comfort in times of great emotional and personal distress. To discredit religion as a source of individual and communal strength is to reject one of the ways of being queer in Africa.

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<sup>394</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 74.

## CONCLUSION

In the Introduction, I addressed Ngũgĩ's concept of "re-membering" and the power of creative acts as the instigation of an African renaissance. Whereas Achebe and Ngũgĩ disagreed on what language(s) Africans should write in, Achebe's literary and theoretical writings contribute to Ngũgĩ's affirmation of creative re-membrance. Their shared affirmation of the imagination and creativity as a source of individual, social, and cultural renewal points directly to how their philosophical perspectives intertwine more so than diverge. Overall, Achebe and Ngũgĩ underscore creativity and imagination as a site of socio-cultural rejuvenation.

I like to envision this project, too, as a continuous site of rejuvenation. This project began as a search for queer utopic imagery in African literatures and cinema. I cast my hopes towards African futures where queer Africans lived without threat to their livelihoods. That Africans molded new and different forms of what queer means and how those forms question, alter, and critique notions of queerness in the Global North. Indeed, as I began this project, scholars from around the globe published articles, collections, and books about queer Africa. These aspirational works denounced pernicious myths of Africa as a homophobic continent, of homosexuality as a foreign importation, and of queerness as inherently incompatible with African identities. Scholars, activists, filmmakers, photographers, and other artists claimed queerness for their own, forging new and different identities and communities with an eye towards the future. In many ways, this has culminated in the development of Queer African Studies.

Queer African Studies is an intellectually nascent endeavor. Its emergence from the social sciences promotes particular perspectives and attitudes towards the study of non-normative African identities, as well as specific goals. Such as the promotion of LGBTQ rights on the continent and the delegitimization of the popular phrase "homosexuality is un-African."

These goals emphasize the necessity for dedicated researchers – ethnographers, anthropologists, sociologists, etc. – and working in tandem with African activist organizations. Indeed, Queer African Studies embraces activist scholarship and aims to alter misperceptions of non-normative African identities for the sake of destabilizing essentialist notions of what it means to be "African" as perceived by Africans and by outsiders.

What remains to be seen is how creative and imaginative works can or will influence Queer African Studies in meaningful and abrasive ways. Simplistic proclamations conceding the importance of the arts in the promotion of queer African identities does not do the necessary work of demonstrating how and why such work matters. Scholarship about homosexuality in African literatures has, to a certain extent, focused on surface-level concerns, such as the sheer existence of homosexuality in texts and whether or not they positively or negatively represent queer identities. Literary texts possess abilities to tug at standardized, normalized modes of thinking. Even though Queer Africans Studies is new, it appears to be falling into a trap of normalization, of embracing rote conclusions: homosexuality exists and has existed in Africa. But to even acknowledge the existence of homosexuality and its histories on the continent is, as demonstrated in the opening chapters, a grand statement in its own right. Nevertheless, for Queer African Studies to thrive, it must push against any and all forms of scholarly standardization. Literature and cinema – more generally speaking, all creative acts – can help in the resistance against complacency. Ideally, this project will be the beginning of a larger, more expansive work with the intention of establishing a queer African literary and cinematic history.

I continue to wonder how, not if, the ideas, actions, and works of Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o can affect Queer African Studies, and if imaginative creations offer the best avenue for the exploration of different, but perhaps not always new, sexual identities and genders

in Africa. I also wonder how contemporary queer African artists from the continent and throughout the diaspora reimagine Achebe and Ngũgĩ's thoughts and redirect them towards the resuscitation of cultures, languages, and identities perceived as non-existent, at least non-existent until the arrival of Westerners. Through their works, Diriye Osman and Chinelo Okparanta help write back into existence queer African histories. They are re-membered and are slowly brought back into the admixture that is being "African."

But we must also turn to older works and different forms of creative expression. Evidently, Yulisa Amadu Maddy's reputation amongst LGBTQ communities extends into other contexts, such as the Pride Library. It was sheer luck that I discovered Maddy's inclusion, and it makes me wonder whether other LGBTQ communities and organizations have similarly remembered African artists. Likewise, cinema preserves queer African communities for the future. With *Woubi chéri* being one of the first of its kind, it marked a new opportunity for queer Africans to speak of their varied lives. International concerns about queer Africans have grown over the years, and I do not think it impossible that more films will emerge – documentaries and fiction films – about African LGBTQ stories. Artists like South African photographer Zanele Muholi, whose works document the lives of black queer South African women, offer different methods for the preservation of queer African memory. Indeed, new movements emerge everyday and only the future knows how they will sustain the development of queer African communities.

While I conclude this project at this point, it remains a project under development. There will always be new perspectives, new texts, and new ideas to add. Things will always require changing, editing, revision, and re-revision. I dedicated several years to this project, but I always find something new to include. This is what also makes this project difficult to end. The lives of

queer Africans and their work does not end at this conclusion. For example, activists such as the Ugandan LGBTQ organization Spectrum continue to work for better health care and greater social awareness for queer Africans all the while fighting against the criminalization of homosexuality. Their SMUG counterparts, too, will continue with efforts to educate others and battle against human rights abuses. This project is one of many new approaches to Queer African Studies. I hope that all new projects and efforts to speak about queer Africans consciously interact, communicate and work with affected communities. Only by doing so with Queer African Studies form intimate international communities dedicated to the rights of LGBTQ individuals across the continent.



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